

What Saith the Scripture?

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The Lord's People His Portion

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Text.--Deut. 32:9: "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance."

Text.--Mal. 3:17: "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

In speaking on the subject presented in these passages, I propose,

I. To notice briefly some of the Bible representations respecting God's regard for His people;

II. Some of the reasons for His regarding them thus;

III. Show that they are truly His portion.

I. The great love of God to His people is one of the leading themes of the Bible.

- 1. Through Jeremiah (31:3) God declared of His collective people -- "Yes, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." To the same purport are the two passages read to you as my text. "The Lord's portion is His people;" but one's portion is that which he most highly values. It is his peculiar treasure.
- 2. "They shall be Mine when I make up My jewels;" and jewels are of all things most precious and most prized. On no other earthly thing do men set so high a value. This term, therefore, chosen of God to indicate His regard for His people, must be intensely expressive.
- 3. Elsewhere His love for His people is spoken of as being exceedingly great and unchangeable. How rich is the view given of its intensity by those words found in Isa. 49:14-16. But Zion had said -- "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

- 4. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me."

Can any illustration be found more expressive than this? What love is more tender and more enduring than a mother's?

- 5. The Bible abounds with representations to show that God rejoices over His people with great joy and rests in this love with intense satisfaction. It also represents His love for His people as very peculiar -- altogether unlike the love He has for any other creatures. Indeed this class of statements are so abundant in the Bible that no careful reader can fail to have noticed them. I need not dwell on these passages, nor expand this point of my subject.

II. God has good reasons for this high regard.

- 1. Of course we must assume that if the fact be as the Bible represents, God must have good reasons, for He is never unreasonable in anything -- never cherished a regard for any person or object, save as there were the best of reasons for such regard. Least of all would He be unreasonable in His estimate of things valuable and worthy of His love. We are safe in saying that He is never partial -- never capricious in His love for His people. It cannot be supposed that He loves them for any other than good reasons. So far forth as His love is peculiar, there must be peculiar reasons for it. It must forever be true that He loved them for good reasons and not for no reasons at all.

Before I became a Christian I was perplexed very much by what I heard said on this subject; for it seemed to me to represent God's love for His people as altogether capricious. It seemed to me that special pains were taken to represent God as loving them for no known reasons, or at least, for reasons, if any, which were not at all apparent and could not be known by us. To my mind, this seemed to be precisely what we call partiality and caprice -- to love without any good reason, existing either in the object of this love, or in anything else that ought to influence such a being. I cannot enter at length into this subject; it would occupy too much time.

- 2. It is made plain in the Bible that God loves all men, irrespective of their character with a great love, vastly surpassing all our conceptions. He loves to do them good and this love is so exceedingly great and far reaching that He is always seeking opportunities for its exercise and manifestation. We see it on every side in His providence; it shines out in every feature of His glorious gospel.
- 3. But His love to His people is peculiar -- a love unlike any other -- a complacent regard -- a delight of entirely another sort from any that He feels in ungodly men. One reason for His peculiar love for them is that He has been able to gain their confidence. In the case of others, He has failed, although He has always done all He wisely could to gain it. It is strikingly true that God is always doing all He reasonably can to gain the confidence of all His intelligent creatures. Great is the joy of His heart when He succeeds. We know how parents enjoy it to have the entire confidence of their children. So, and more, does God enjoy the confidence of

His people. The fact that they repose confidence in Him cheerfully, must greatly endear them to His heart. It is this primarily which makes them His people -- their faith in His name.

Again, He loves them because He has been able to gain their hearts, and hence their consent to become His people and be adopted by Him as His children. He has in the same manner offered His hand to others, but they would not accept it. Hence there is good reason for His very peculiar regard for them. Why should not He love His own adopted children -- those who are willing to be adopted and to regard themselves as truly the Lord's? He is their Father in a peculiar sense. In the general sense of being their Creator, He is the Father of all His creatures; but He is a Father to His people in a far higher sense. He has begotten them to Himself by regeneration of the Spirit. He has won them to His love and service from a state of great enmity. Why should not He feel a most tender regard for them?

Again, He loves them for their steadfastness to Him amid great trials and temptations. He knows that this is a world of great trial and He also very well knows our frailty and intrinsic weakness. When therefore He finds that by His constant grace He can hold them in the main steadfast in His love and service, He must look upon them with intense interest. True they sometimes falter; but on the whole they endure and are steadfast, and in this He greatly rejoices. The very watchfulness He exercises over them may serve to endear them to Him the more. Just as parents love those children most whom they watch over, down almost to the gates of the grave; and for the same reason those also who greatly tax their solicitude for their morals and their souls. If, after many a care and struggle and many tears, they have the joy of seeing them stronger in virtue, their joy in them is exceedingly great. The parent who sees a child passing through great trials -- somewhat as God sees His children tried, yet only the more purified thereby -- cannot fail to feel for such one a most deep and thrilling regard. All a parent's heart is drawn out towards him.

- 4. We may put this general analogy in a somewhat different form. Suppose an earthly sovereign is called to pass through great trials and difficulties, of such sort as must test his people's love and allegiance very severely, yet they are firm and never fail; will not this greatly endear them to his heart?

So the cause of God on earth sometimes passes under a cloud. Adverse circumstances throw their shade over it; foes are strong and bold, and friends are few and weak; -- then if God's people stand firm, and are only the more decided and bold for God, must not this endear them to His heart exceedingly?

Again, the nature of their dependence on Him must greatly endear them to His heart. He sees how absolute this dependence is -- how utterly powerless in a moral sense they are against temptation and sin, save as they look to Him to be upheld and made strong. Earthly parents can understand how and why the weakness of children makes them dear to a parent's heart. They will tell you they always love their most dependent children most tenderly. I never felt this fully in my experience till the birth of my youngest who, as most of you know, was extremely dependent. Poor weak creature, and as dear to our

hearts as she was weak -- how she used to hang upon us for all her comforts, and how warmly did her parents' hearts respond to this so earnestly expressed dependence! I never shall forget how her last look went to my heart as I was leaving her to visit England. That look was so imploring, so full of dependence, it seemed to say so expressively -- Will my last friend leave me? -- It seemed almost too much for a parent's heart to bear. The nature of that dear little one's dependence on her parents taught me many lessons in regard to the feelings of God towards us in view of our extreme dependence on Him. I have said -- If God is indeed a father to His people and sees and feels all their weakness and their utter dependence on Him, and if He feels as earthly parents do when weakness makes its touching and melting appeal to their hearts, then certainly we may trust Him forever!

- 5. Consider, again, as another reason for His great and tender regard for His people -- the great sacrifices He has made for them. We know that things become dear to us much in proportion to the sacrifices they cost us. Sacrifices are the price we pay, and that which costs us dear will be held as correspondingly dear to our hearts.

Now as to God, it cost Him little to create the universe. It was done in a very short time -- and cost but little of either trouble, effort or sacrifice, compared with what it has cost Him to redeem His people from their sins, and make them what they should be. The creating of the universe did not cost Him the blood of His own Son!

Again, God loves His people for their sincerity. However great their weakness, they are sincere. They may sometimes falter before the shock of some strong temptation; but deep in their hearts they are sincere, and God cannot but know it. If they lack this fundamental quality, they are not His children. It may please Him sometimes to put this sincerity to the test. He may ask them as He did Peter -- Lovest thou Me? But yet He knows they can answer with Peter -- "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He loves them for their sincerity, and does not despise them for their weakness. It is written -- "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." We may perhaps despise our sincere friends for their weakness; but God does not. He regards their affection towards Him with tenderness, although they are really and exceedingly weak as to moral strength.

- 6. Another reason for His peculiar love to them is that He views them as in Christ, perfect. Not as perfect in themselves; but as perfect, seen in Christ. So viewed, He sees no iniquity in Jacob. He has made Christ unto them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and whatever part Christ sustains is borne perfectly -- is so sustained as leaves nothing more or better to be desired. Whoever is in Christ is "complete in Him." Hence there is a sense in which God does not regard His people as so very imperfect -- as we do when we see them only as in themselves. God sees them in Christ, and therefore sees abundant ground for their free pardon and full acceptance before Him. It is also true that prospectively, He sees them in the beauty of perfect holiness -- the germ of which is already developing and it is His great joy to nourish and cultivate it to that destined perfection.

III. God's people are His portion.

- 1. This implies that they are set apart to Him -- made over and sure to His use and possession. It also implies that they are of some real value to Him and to interests which He holds dear. A portion, held as such by one so capable of judging of values as God is, must be of very great value.
- 2. That they are His is manifest from the nature of their relations to Him. In the nature of the case, children are the wealth of their parents. What other wealth can be so real to parents, as this? Well may they regard all other sorts of wealth as only relative -- that is, as valuable only as it may be useful to their children. Especially is it true of good children that they are eminently the wealth of their parents.

So God's people are valuable to Him because they are sincerely good -- sincerely devoted to His interests. Pre-eminently is it true that those children are a treasure for whom great sacrifices have been made and who labor to requite those sacrifices by a grateful and a devoted life. Precisely this is the peculiar characteristic of all honest and earnest Christians. This state of mind proves that they are His children, and it is this state, especially, which makes them a real treasure to God.

Compared with this, the physical universe is of small value to Him -- of almost no value, save as a home for intelligent minds, and a means of their existence and culture. Planets are cheap, but souls are precious.

- 3. The mutual relations between God and His people, when well considered, show that God's people must be of great value. For, His government is moral; it acts on intelligent minds and aims to secure their highest obedience and happiness. Consequently, to make this government eminently efficient for these ends, God needs such subjects as converted men, who may become witnesses for Him and children under such a Father. He needs and knows how to use this example. Beyond all question He can use them for great and widely useful ends in His mural kingdom. To all eternity we shall be learning more and more of this great value of His people to His kingdom.
- 4. Again, they are an ever-increasing portion. By this I mean, not merely that they are perpetually increasing in number, although this may be true and some passages of scripture seem to support it; but I mean, in yet another sense, that they are a fountain of great interest to Him because they are constituted for perpetual and indefinite progression. Look at this. Once we were in a state of deep, entire ignorance and our mental capacities were low, in accordance with that stage of acquisition. But the law of progress obtains throughout the entire family of God's intelligent creatures. Carrying out this law, we shall see that a period will arrive when the one who entered heaven last and least will know more and will have more capacity of knowing than all the intelligent universe have now. This aggregate, taken now must be less than the knowledge and capacity of him who shall enter heaven last and least, taken at some remote period in the onward march of his mind. This result is of necessity just as certain as the law of progress itself, gives, an eternity to be used in making this progress, and it inevitably follows that he who is least in heaven will one day know more than the whole created universe knows now. And how can any one doubt for a moment that this is the law of all human intelligences?

- 5. We see this law pervading the present world. It is this law which so greatly heightens our interest in our children. We see them begin with nothing, but almost immediately, the law of progress develops its operation.

We see that they are growing -- their mind is expanding and their knowledge is increasing. As they pass one point after another, our heart burns within us at the grateful sight. With a sacred pride, we watch this growth and acquisition. I have sat here on commencement day and looked with admiration at parents sitting in this house to see their children graduate. Some of you have observed it, you have seen the tears in their eyes as they listened to the performance of their son or their daughter in their graduating exercises. If you speak to them of that son or daughter, you will see that they think there is wealth there and a wealth in which they feel a most intense interest. So we may suppose God to feel when He sees His people graduating from one stage of their mental and moral progress, to another. Some of us may have lost children. If we were now to meet them in heaven and were to see how much they have advanced since they left us and how fast their powers have been developed, perhaps we should not even know them. We might be in danger of supposing one some angel of light, rather than that little and immature thing we once called our own child.

- 6. In regard to this law of progress it matters not as to our argument whether the progress be slow or fast, with eternal ages for growth and expansion, the amount of progress must at some remote point be so great as to defy all computation.

So will virtue and love increase. Saints in heaven will grow in love to God. Even the least of them will advance beyond the point where the greatest are now. That little imbecile of mine may be so advanced already that if I were to meet her now, I might almost suppose her to be some angel. Those of us who have lost children, going before us to the better country, may find when we come to meet them that all our highest views of progress are low and our most exalted conceptions of progress in heaven are mean compared with the reality. Doubtless there will be more in each of God's children to be loved than we can now conceive. In the lapse of ages there will come an hour when their beauty and loveliness will far surpass all we had ever dreamed. Even here we have seen their loveliness -- their humility, their deep peace -- their earnest consecration to their Master's work; and seeing all these, we have exclaimed -- What beauty. What divine loveliness overspreads this character! But how much greater must these developments be in heaven!

How do you regard those children of yours who are increasing in loveliness when you see one pleasing trial of character after another putting forth, like the opening rose bursting its prison doors and coming forth in ever fresh beauties and glories!

We must conceive of this future increase as big as a compound ration, since it depends on both knowledge and virtue, each of these acting unutterably on the other, and moral growth being conditioned on each. With the growth of knowledge, the soul is able to comprehend more and more of the deep things of God, and to pass on continually to newer lessons, using them all evermore to subserve the greater ends of real holiness. On the other hand, religious purpose pushes the soul forward in attainment of divine

knowledge, and in many ways fosters intellectual growth. Then when all the powers of both intellect and heart are brought to act harmoniously and are put to their fullest development, the soul's progress must be exceedingly rapid. How wonderfully will the mind grasp new thoughts, and how naturally will all this acquired knowledge be carried out to the legitimate ends of a holy life!

- 7. God has enjoyed all this from eternity. His happiness has always been found largely in His obedient creatures. Their value is therefore by no means fictitious. Things are valuable in God's sight and in truth, according as they are conducive to happiness. God's intelligent and obedient creatures conduce exceedingly to His happiness, and to the happiness of the universe, and they are therefore really His portion. Some have supposed that God is above all wants -- that even if He existed alone in a vacant universe, sustaining no relations whatever to other existences because there are no other, He would still be no less happy than He now is. I suppose no such thing. I take this view of the case. God is benevolent. He finds His blessedness in this benevolence: in other words, He finds it in promoting the happiness of His creatures. In harmony with this view, the scriptures represent God as happy in His creation prospectively, before it came into being. Even from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. Wisdom was with Him rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth and her delights were with the sons of men (Prov. 8:22-31). God's infinity does not absolve Him from the conditions of moral agency. To be happy, He must be virtuous -- a law of moral agency which is no less applicable to God, the Infinite One, than to any of His finite creatures. The laws of His being must come from His own intelligent and moral nature, and must be in essence the same as obtain in the case of all intelligent and moral beings. Hence His benevolent happiness demands as its condition the existence of creatures whom He can bless and in whose blessedness He may find the heightening and perfecting of His own. His people, therefore, have to Him a value not fictitious by any means, but real. Through all a past eternity, it has been His purpose to do all He is doing in time. Evermore His virtue has been His blessedness.

REMARKS.

1. This subject is not enough considered. In its practical applications, it is exceedingly useful to encourage faith in God. I know personally that one phase of faith, more difficult than any other, is to realize that I can be of any consequence in God's universe. It is hard to see how I can be regarded as anything but a filthy, contemptible wretch. Hence I have found it important to study the Bible on this point and to receive it and believe it and take the comfort of its teachings, despite of the devil. He is a liar and tries to drive me off and shut me up in despondency; but I need the comfort of God's truth and I will have it.

2. This truth -- that God's people are His portion -- and are objects of His intense love and regard -- is of great value to us in resisting temptations to despondency. The tendency of conscious guilt and unworthiness is always to make one say, "What am I and what is my father's house?" It is not in vain therefore that God has expressed this love for His people. However great therefore our guilt may be, and however great our conviction of sin and our reasons for regarding ourselves as the offscouring of all things, yet if we will look into what God has said about rejoicing over His people; if we will notice how He mourns over their misdeeds and rejoices over them when they repent; if we listen and hear Him say -- "How can I give thee up Ephraim, how can I deliver thee, Israel; My heart is turned within

Me; My repentings are kindled together"; -- if we think of these manifestations of our Father's heart, we shall surely see that we should be encouraged to trust Him as our Father. We should know that He loves us and cares most deeply for our welfare.

I fear that we who are parents are not sufficiently aware of the importance of encouraging obedience in our children by manifestations of our regard for them. Perhaps we think it bad to commend; but God does not take this course; the apostles did not; but they commended warmly, although they also rebuked sharply. It is well always to commend and encourage obedience and to show that we love to see it and are happy in them when they are obedient.

It is even right that we should both feel and manifest a sacred pride in their obedience and virtue. How greatly this encourages children, we ought to know from our own experience. Daughter, will you make your mother's heart leap for joy! Is not this a good motive for obedience and for love? Did you even think it wrong to say -- I will try to make my father's heart glad? Think of it; he can scarcely read your letters, his heart so yearns with joy over a virtuous, lovely daughter; and is it not best for you to cherish this feeling of joy in making his heart glad? And now shall we not believe that God feels the same yearning and the same intense love of His children -- the same joy in seeing them do well? If so, shall we not find our highest joy in making Him happy?

Whenever you have had anything come home to your heart, saying -- Well done, good and faithful servant, -- what effect did it have upon you? Did it make you proud? No; you longed to keep low at His feet, and never did you feel this more deeply -- I never shall -- I never can, offend Him again.

3. This subject is adapted to the case of impenitent sinners. I can remember how I used to feel in regard to God's people. I looked on them as the excellent of the earth, although I saw some of them living wrong. But the question would often arise -- What are they in the estimation of God? This would always take hold of my heart and make me say -- Is it possible for me ever to be loved of God as His people are?

Again, this subject encourages supplication. When we duly appreciate the wealth God has in His people, then we shall see that we may come and ask anything that is in harmony with His heart, anything that seems essential to the interests of His kingdom, assured that He will hear and do. If we regard our children as our wealth, our children will know it. When they see how much we enjoy their developments in the right direction, they are encouraged to ask anything of us that manifestly conduces to the ends they know we seek and love. They learn what influence they can rightly have over us and how they may properly use it. So, as we come to learn more and more of God's heart we shall have greater confidence in praying for those things which we see to be in harmony with His heart.

4. This subject, well considered, tends strongly to win home to God the backslider. Let him listen and hear his divine Father say, "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." Does not this naturally draw him back to such a Father? Who can withstand such an appeal to his heart? When God calls back His wanderers thus and shows the great depth of His heart's love for them; when He says to an apostate and unfaithful wife -- "Return unto

Me, and I will return unto you" -- he sees that however guilty and lost, he may come back to God and find a Father's heart open.

He will see that it is not in God's heart to despise one of His least children. Before I had an imbecile child myself, I used to think a parent would be ashamed of such a child, and could find no heart to love them, and nothing in them to love. But now I know very well that no children can be loved so deeply and tenderly as an imbecile. Never could the thought come into my heart to despise such a child -- never any other feeling but that of unqualified pity. With all my heart, I would make common cause with such a child and stand by it forever. Now I can understand how God cannot despise one of His least and weakest children.

5. Hence the subject is useful to the poor of this world and to the uneducated. There always are many who have no other prospect but to be poor and uneducated. Be it so; if you are God's child, you have a sincere heart and God cannot despise you because of your poverty or lack of education. I see some here today who can never enjoy the same opportunities for education which they are struggling hard to give to their children. Often have I been affected, more than I can express, with the interest manifested here by parents to give their children a far better education than they ever had or could have. It is noble; it is often a truly Christian self-sacrifice for others' good. Perhaps God rewards you for it even now by giving you children who do not despise you because you are illiterate. So and much more, God does not despise His poor and unlearned children.

6. The subject is appropriate to humble the worldly great and rich. In a meeting of the church in Boston last winter, a brother rose and spoke of the importance of interesting themselves in the case of the Lord's poor. Another rose and said, if we wished to look for God's choice and loved ones, we should not find them among those who are rich in gold, but among those who are rich in faith. These are prevalent in prayer, and happy in God. Such are most often among the poor of this world. Then let the rich man come down, and not think himself because of his riches above his poorer brother. God knows no man after the flesh. In His sight mere worldly distinctions go for nothing. Why should not we try to estimate values as God does?

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not

make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.

3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.
4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.

11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.