

A PECULIAR PEOPLE

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, 11th July, 1841, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London.

"A peculiar people." - 1Pe 2:9

WHAT an involuntary testimony do ungodly persons often bear to the truth of the Scriptures! What, for instance, is more common in the world, and amongst those who are lying dead in a profession, than language of this kind: What an odd kind of people there are at such a chapel! what particular notions they have! what peculiar sentiments they entertain! There is only a set of peculiar books suited to them, and there are only a few peculiar preachers whom they will hear; and in all their words and actions they manifest an exclusiveness, a bigotry, a narrow-mindedness which is very different from what you witness at other places!

Is not this bearing a testimony to the truth of God's Word? Does not truth unwillingly fall here from the lips of enemies? Has not God Himself said that they are a peculiar people? Then this very peculiarity which is stamped upon them, and which the keen eye of the world discovers, is an evidence that they are those, of whom God has said that they are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. This peculiar people has existed through all ages from the days of the first promise, and will exist until the final consummation of all things.

Abel was one of this peculiar people; and the peculiar blessings that God favoured him with, drew down upon him the wrath of his murderous brother. Noah was one of this peculiar people, whom God directed to build the ark, as typical of Christ Jesus the Lord, in whom His dear people find a refuge from the deluging waves and showers of God's wrath. Lot in Sodom was one of this peculiar people, who vexed his righteous soul from day to day by witnessing their ungodly deeds. Abraham in the land of the Canaanites, Isaac his son, Jacob his grandson, were the ancestors of a peculiar people, upon whom God had set his own stamp that He had separated them from the nations of the earth, as typical of a people foreordained to eternal glory.

The separation of the Jews, the lineal descendants of Abraham, from all nations, typified the separation of the elect from all the people that dwell upon the face of the earth; and the enmity that was manifested against that peculiar people was but a manifestation of the enmity which exists in the heart against the people of God - the development of that enmity which God said He would Himself put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Ge 3:15 When they were in Egypt, their being a peculiar people called forth the enmity of that king that knew not Joseph. After the captivity, when they were dispersed through various lands, they called forth the enmity of Haman. He therefore went to the king his master and said, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of

silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries." Es 3:8,9

Here was the discovery of the venom that ever dwells in the heart of the reprobate against the elect; here was the manifestation of that hidden enmity, which exists in the world against the peculiar family of Jehovah. These manifestations, then, of enmity are marks and testimonies, not merely to the truth of revelation, but in favour of those people against whom these envenomed arrows are shot. And depend upon it, friends, if you and I have never been aimed at by the bitter shafts of contempt, if we have never experienced persecution, if our fair fame has never been tarnished by the malicious slander of the world, if we have never been held up to scorn and execration as having such a peculiarity stamped upon us as the world hates, we carry with us no evidence that we are of the number of that peculiar people whom God has chosen in Christ, and blessed with all spiritual blessings in Him.

There is a peculiar people, then; and the desire of every heart that God has touched with His finger is sweetly breathed forth in the language of Ruth, when she said, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" . Ru 1:16 "Yes", says the living soul whom God has quickened into a new and spiritual existence -"yes, they are the people of God; my heart cleaves to them with affection, I desire to be one with them; may my lot and portion be among the living family of God. Though there are in them many things which grieve me, though there are in them many divisions, though there is much lacking in them which I desire to see present, and much present in them which I desire to see absent, yet with all their failings and all their imperfections and all their infirmities, they are the people of the living God. With them I desire to live, and with them I desire to die." Then, friends, if you and I are walking in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, we shall carry about with us some stamp, some evidence, that we belong to this peculiar people; we shall bear with us some marks that God has separated us, by a work of grace upon our souls, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. Ex 33:16

But this people are a peculiar people in several points of view. They are a peculiar people by the original separation of them in the eternal councils of the Three-one God. They were chosen in Christ before all worlds, that they might be a people in whom the Lord Jesus might eternally delight, and in whom He might eternally be glorified. Their fall in their first parent was foreseen and foreprovided for. The Lamb of God was slain, in the mind of God the Father, before the foundation of the world, and they stood eternally one with Christ, justified in His glorious righteousness, holy in His spotless innocency, perfect in His perfection, and comely in His comeliness.

And thus this peculiar people were blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, Eph 1:3 before time had an existence; before this world had a being; before the all-creative voice of God made the sun and stars shine in the skies; when eternity alone existed, and the Three-one God dwelt alone in sacred communion, without any one object of Their creative hand. This people had a being then in the mind of God; and in virtue of this original being, they are brought forth first in time (each according to the moment that God has foreordained) and then in God's appointed season, are brought forth by the quickening operations of the Holy Ghost into a new and spiritual existence.

But how, as a matter of individual inquiry, shall we know that we belong to this peculiar people? Shall we turn over the leaves of our Bible, and read, Eph 1:1 or, Ro 8:1 and seeing there that God has an elect people, at once conclude that we belong to them? Shall we turn to the first epistle of John, and reading there The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin, therefore conclude that our iniquities are pardoned? Shall we cast our eyes on the text Who is he that condemneth? it is God that justifieth; - and by reading that text of Scripture, without further ado, believe in our own personal justification? No; this may do for a dry professor, for one dead in a form; but it will never do for a living soul, whose conscience God has touched with His own finger. Before he can realize his interest in those blessings, wherewith God has blessed His people before all worlds, he must have a personal manifestation and revelation of those blessings to his own soul, under the operations of the Holy Spirit; and if they are not sealed upon his conscience, and evidenced to his heart, by the witness of the Holy Ghost, he can never be satisfied that he is a sharer in those blessings that are stored up for the elect in Christ Jesus.

But there are certain marks and evidences, which fall short of the manifestation of Christ with power to the soul; there are testimonies which do not amount to a full and complete satisfaction; and when a child of God is in deep poverty and strong exercises of soul, he will be glad to accept a little token when he cannot get a greater. The beggar in the street will take a copper coin; he does not turn away from that with contempt; his hunger and his poverty make the smallest gift acceptable. A man in good circumstances would turn away from such a pitiful donation, and think it an insult; but he that is deeply sunk in poverty is glad to have anything that may relieve his pressing want. Many times, when the Lord lays poverty as a deep and galling load upon the souls of His dear family, He makes them glad to get hold of those little coins (I mean apparently such, for no coin is little that comes from heaven's mint), which proud professors despise.

We will, then, with God's blessing, endeavour to trace out a few of the peculiar marks that are stamped upon this peculiar people; and if the Lord shall be pleased through my mouth to convey from the courts of heaven one of these coins into your heart, He will lock it up safe in that treasury; He will sometimes bring it out for you to look upon; and thus you will have at times a sweet evidence that you are interested in that love which knows no bounds.

1. The peculiar people, then, have peculiar exercises. No man knows anything of spiritual exercises, except he is a spiritual man. He may have convictions, it is true; he may have passing doubts and fears; he may have some dim and dismal apprehensions of the wrath to come; but as to spiritual exercises, he knows them not, for they are peculiar to spiritually taught people.

But all God's family, each according to their measure, have spiritual exercises. Sometimes, for instance, they are powerfully exercised with unbelief; that is, the unbelief of their hearts so powerfully works in their carnal mind, as to obscure every evidence, hide every testimony, and deface every inscription that the Holy Ghost has engraved upon their souls. But it is not the mere existence of unbelief, that manifests a child of God, for unbelief reigns and rules in the hearts of the reprobate; it is the exercise of the soul under unbelief, that shows the existence of spiritual life; it is the

conflict, the opposition, the struggle, that is carried on in the bosom; for this implies a counteracting principle, the existence of the company of two armies. So 6:13

To be shut up in unbelief is no testimony of being a living soul; but to find in our hearts a counteracting principle which discovers unbelief, which fights against unbelief, which groans under unbelief as a burden, which longs to be delivered from the power of unbelief- here we trace the existence of a living principle, by the opposition which that living principle carries on against the unbelief which rises up in the carnal mind. The grand thing which I want to come at in my own soul, and which I want to come at in yours, is this -the existence of the life of God, and I desire to trace out in your consciences this hidden life, in some of its bearings and its workings. But in order to do that, I must go into those exercises of soul, wherein the life of God is manifested.

If I were to say, "Every one who has unbelief is a child of God," I should build up a false evidence, because there are hundreds and thousands and millions, who have unbelief, who are not children of God; and therefore I must come to the grace of God in the soul, the work of the Spirit in the heart, the existence of a living principle which works and manifests itself under this mass of unbelief that seems to press it down. But, again, I want something more than that. Suppose you were in Derbyshire, and a person were to say to you, "There is a river here, the river Dove, which buries itself in a certain spot close by, and runs underground for a considerable distance." You would say, "I think I can hear it rushing along, but I certainly should prefer ocular evidence; and if I cannot see where the river first buries itself, I should like to see it in some part of its subterraneous course." Now if that person could take you to some deep dell or rocky chasm, where the earth parted, and you, looking down into the deep fissure, saw as well as heard the river rushing along, you would say, "I can believe it now;" and yet all the time this river had been running underground, but when you saw its waters through the chasm in the earth, then you had ocular evidence that the river was there.

So it is with faith in our heart. Faith in the soul runs like a hidden river under the superincumbent mass of unbelief. But how am I to know that it is there? I know it sometimes by the strugglings, the upheavings, the attempts of this river to rise to the light of day. But if sometimes there is a chasm made -if rocky unbelief be parted asunder, and I can discern the actings, breathings, and workings of living faith, and it sparkles up as it catches a beam from the Sun- then I have another and a far brighter evidence that I have the faith of God's elect. Thus, in tracing out the work of faith upon the soul, we must not only discover faith in its conflicts, but we must sometimes see faith in its victories. We must see and feel faith, not merely as heaving itself up under the mass of unbelief, but we must sometimes see that blessed grace springing forth into lively exercise, so as to realize the things of God in Christ. The peculiar people have faith; and this faith is sometimes called forth into blessed exercise, and is drawn up by the Spirit of God, so as to rise up to the light of day, and glisten and shine beneath the Sun of Righteousness.

Again; another exercise of the living soul, is its conflict under that carnality, deadness, earthliness, and barrenness, which seem at times to clasp it down to the earth. But am I to say, that carnality, barrenness, coldness, and deadness are evidences? I say not. But the evidence is, when I find something of a different nature

working up in them and counteracting them, and manifesting the power and strength of the Spirit's work in the midst of them. If I say, "I am carnal, I am dead, I am cold, I am stupid, I am unfeeling, I am lifeless, therefore I am a child of God," what do I but build up that which is the work of the flesh, and say of it that it is the work of the Spirit? Again; do I say, "I am always spiritual and heavenly minded, I am always enjoying the presence of Christ as my soul-satisfying portion, I am never dead nor stupid nor barren;" durst I say such things (I dare not say them, for I should have a lie in my right hand), it would be distressing the poor, burdened and exercised family, and not casting up the highway in which the redeemed walk.

But the path of the just is one in which spirituality at times breathes forth out of carnality, life at times enjoys blessed deliverance out of death, fruitfulness at times overcomes barrenness, light at times bursts forth out of darkness, mercy at times overcomes guilt, love at times casts out fear, and hope at times repels despondency. Here we come to that which is peculiar to the quickened elect; we touch upon peculiar workings, peculiar traces; here we begin to discern the stamp of the Holy Ghost, as distinct from all the religion of the flesh, and all the delusions and deceits of the wicked one. But those who have no grace are very glad to hide themselves under the wing of a minister; and when they hear him speak of deadness, carnality, barrenness, unbelief, and doubt -"Ah!" say they, "he is tracing out my experience now; oh! I can come in there; there is a little nibble for me". But what is he tracing out? Not the work of God in the soul, not the work of the Spirit upon the conscience; but that carnality, barrenness, and death, which all men have -merely the work of the flesh, and not the work of the Spirit of God.

But God's people have also peculiar exercises under temptations. To have temptations is no mark of being a child of God, because men in the world have temptations. What makes the pick-pocket dip his fingers into the coat of the passer-by? Temptation to theft. What makes the drunkard steal into the gin palace? The love of drink. What brings the felon to the gallows? Temptation to murder.

Therefore the existence of temptation and the power of temptation is no proof of being a child of God; but the proof of being a child of God is what are the feelings and exercises of the soul under temptations, how the living principle is manifested by working against and under temptations. Is there any pain? Does temptation cause distress? Is there a sigh and cry to God for deliverance? Does the renewed spirit groan and heave exceedingly beneath the heavy weight of it? Are there occasional deliverances from it? Is mercy manifested in pardoning the soul that has been entangled in it? Is the grace of God blessedly glorified in healing the backslidings that temptations have caused? Is there a stretching forth of the arms of faith to embrace the cross of Christ as the only refuge from temptation? Now we come to life. But if you conclude yourself to be a child of God because you are tempted, it is but a deceiving of yourself. It is an awful delusion of the devil to set up temptation as an evidence of grace, without the exercises of the soul under temptation, without the burdens of temptation, without the bitter sighs and cries under temptation, without deliverance out of temptation. To set up temptations in themselves as way-marks is nothing else but to obscure the road which the Holy Ghost has traced out in the Word of God, and which the Holy Ghost traces out in the consciences of the living family.

2. But again, the peculiar people have peculiar deliverances. And after all, friends, say what we may about doubts and fears, and convictions, and distresses, and sore temptations, and painful exercises, I am well convinced that the grand soul-satisfying evidence is deliverance. Does the prisoner, when he is confined in the dark cell, feel an evidence that he shall come abroad by looking at the prison bars? Does the trembling criminal standing upon the gallows, and reaching forth his anxious eyes over the crowd, if he can see the king's messenger riding at full speed with a pardon in his hand, conclude that he shall be respited because he feels the halter pinching his neck? No; it is deliverance which is the testimony; it is the king's pardon which sets him free; it is the unrolling of the document signed by the hand of the sovereign, that detaches the noose from his neck, and sends him forth once more among his fellows as a living man.

And so it is with a child of God that is exercised with distressing fears, that feels the agonizing throes of despair in his soul, that seems suspended over eternity by a hair. He wants deliverance, he wants pardon, he wants a testimony, he wants the manifestation of God's mercy to his soul. "Well," but say some, "if this be the case, if there is no evidence to be traced in doubts and fears, if sin and corruption and temptation are not marks of grace, what in the world makes you and other ministers preach them? Why do not you leave them all alone, and exalt a glorious Christ? and why not have done with all these temptations and corruptions?" I will tell you why. Suppose that I had lost my way in going to a place which I very anxiously wished to reach, and I inquired of a person whom I can trust which is the road to it. He tells me, and he says, "I will give you a mark to know the road by; it is very hilly, it is very rough, it is very rugged and stony; there are many pits and sloughs in it, and above all the road is very dirty". I listen to his instructions; I thank him for his intelligence, and I start forth. But I come to a road as smooth as a bowling- green; I find not one stone on the road bigger than M'Adam himself would allow; everything is easy to my feet. "Come," say I to myself, "this cannot be the road; I was told the road had stones in it, and hills and pitfalls, and mud and mire- surely I must be out of the road". But if I find at last a road which is very hilly, and very rough and rugged, and I now and then sink up to my shoes in the mud and mire, and everything which I find in the road tallies with the description which my informant has given me, I say, "I am in the road now; it is just as I was told; here I am in the right road".

Well, the Word of God has traced out the road to heaven as a road of this nature, a rough and thorny road, full of difficulties, exercises, straits and temptations; and if you read the Heb 11 eleventh chapter of Hebrews you will have a description of the travellers there -what exercise and temptations they pass through. The, mark this -the mud, the mire, the stones, the hills, the valleys, are not the road, but they lie in the road. Could they be swept away, the road would be the same; but they are there, and we must travel through them. So with the mud and mire of my heart, the unbelief, and pride, and presumption, and hypocrisy of my fallen nature, the sharp arrows that Satan shoots, the temptations that the world spreads, the opposition of professors, the persecution of the world, the doubts and fears of my own mind -if I am to walk in the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life, I must pass through these.

These are not evidences, but still they are so inseparable from the road, that though they are not the road itself, they so lie in the road that if I walk in that road I must walk through them. Then that is the reason why those who desire to take the

stumbling-blocks out of the way of God's people, and to be sons of consolation to the poor in Zion, talk of doubts, and fears, and exercises, and temptations, and griefs, and sorrows; that they may strengthen the living family who are struggling in this rough and miry road, for a living foot will toil on though in the mud, when a dead carcass would sink in it without a struggle.

For after all, deliverance is the grand evidence. To be sweetly blessed with a view of Jesus; to have the pardon of sin sealed upon the soul; to catch a sight of that glorious robe which covers and shrouds the guilty criminal; to have one's eye open to see Jesus; to look into His bosom; to see His tender heart beating with compassion; and to feel the atoning drops of His blood falling into our conscience, to purge it and to cleanse it from all guilt and sin- that is the evidence, that is the soul-satisfying testimony, and that which brings into the heart the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

None but the elect can ever have this evidence, and I will tell you another thing, none but the elect ever desire to have it. I cannot believe in my conscience that anyone but a vessel of mercy that is quickened by the Holy Ghost ever pants with unutterable pantings after the sweet visitations of the love of God, after the revelation of Christ's presence, and the applications of His atoning blood. I am sure I never dreamt of such things, or cared for such things, and would have derided them as enthusiasm, and trampled them under foot, as nothing but the fanaticism of bigoted minds, until the Lord led me into these feelings, as I trust, by His own powerful and blessed teaching in my soul.

3. But again: this peculiar people will have peculiar marks stamped upon them externally, as well as have peculiar marks internally. They will be separate from the world; they will have no intercourse beyond what business requires with the men of this life, who have no fear of God in their heart, no grace of God in their soul. They will be separated, as God from time to time calls them, from the dead profession of the day; they will have no real fellowship or communion except with the spiritually taught family; they will bear an honest testimony against error of every shape and form; and they will obey strictly that precept, Come out from among them, and be ye separate saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. 2Co 6:17

That is what I have been obliged to do from compulsion; not carnal compulsion, but from inward spiritual compulsion. Who has been wrapped up in stronger folds than I? cradled as it were in everything contrary to the truth of God, swathed round with the strongest swaddling bands of prejudice, steeped up to the lips in worldliness, pride, and ignorance; wrapped round with as many grave-clothes of death as an Egyptian mummy, so that nothing but the hand of God could tear away these folds upon folds, and bring me into anything like uprightness and integrity of heart, and separate me from all that I was entangled in, and from all that I was connected with. I know, then, from personal experience, that there is an inward power communicated, whereby we obey the precept, Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and prefer the reproach of Christ to all the riches of Egypt. In my right mind, I would rather have the testimony of God in poverty and obscurity, than have the testimony of man with all that the world can bestow.

Again, in the peculiar people there will be honesty, uprightness, and integrity. I am ashamed to say it (for it is a blot upon the professing Church), but say it I must, that I myself have known much more honesty and worldly integrity, a nicer sense of honour, more uprightness in worldly dealings, stricter punctuality and straightforwardness in all pecuniary matters, in men of the world who make no profession, than in some of those who pride themselves upon being the people of God. But I believe, wherever the grace of God is in a man's heart, it will make him honest, not merely before God, but honest before men. No shuffling, no evasion, no swindling, no cheating, can ever exist in a regenerate heart.

There is honesty, implanted by God Himself, who searches the heart and tries the reins in every conscience which He has made alive by breathing life into it out of Christ's fullness. It is a black mark against you to be a shuffler. Meanness, trickery, and evasion come not from God. He that dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, will communicate to your soul some measure of His own uprightness. Let us have common honesty, friends; let us have integrity. Let not the world say, "These professors of religion will cheat us if they can". Let us have something like honour and something like uprightness, that we may not bear the stigma which the world would be glad to throw upon us.

4. Again: where God Himself has stamped us as His "peculiar people," there will be marks visible to the church of God; there will be a gentleness, a tenderness, a meekness, a contrition, a softness of spirit. There will not be a pouring forth of the venom and enmity of our carnal mind against all that oppose us; there will be no clambering to get to the topmost seat; there will be no elbowing and thrusting persons here and there, that we may be admired and bowed down to; but there will be humility, and a meekness, and a contrition, and a yielding submission and tenderness of spirit, whereby we are willing to be anything so long as we are dear children. And we shall come sometimes to David's spot, when he said he would rather be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Here is the mirror. Look into it. Can you see your features? Say you, "I have no doubt of election?" Probably not. But has God certified you of your own? Say you, "I believe all the doctrines you preach; my father was a Calvinist; I was always brought up to Dissent, and I have received the doctrines of grace from infancy?" Very likely. But did God Himself ever seal and apply these truths with power to your soul? Those that are born of the Spirit, we read, are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Joh 1:13 Has He stamped His own mark upon your spirit, engraved His own likeness upon your soul, brought you into any measure of conformity to the Son of His love, and raised up in your heart some resemblance to Himself?

I believe many of God's people, if not most have much ado to make their calling and election sure. 2Pe 1:10 They are not a people to take things for granted; they cannot sit at ease and say, "I have no doubt that I am a child of God"; they want something powerful, something applied, something spoken by the mouth of God Himself, and short of that they must be exercised with doubts and fears as to their state before Him. Now let conscience speak; let us turn over the leaves of conscience. What says that faithful witness? Has God spoken with power to your soul? Has He pardoned your sins? Has He given you a sweet testimony of your interest in the Son of His love? Say you, "Why, I do not know that I can say all that, I do not know that God has pardoned

my sins". Well we will come a little lower then: if you cannot say that, we will take a little lower ground; can you say that you are sighing and groaning and crying at times - not always, but as the Lord works in you, for the sweet manifestations of the love of Jesus to your souls? Here is a door open for you -the door of hope in the valley of Achor. Can you come in here? Well, these are marks of being one of God's peculiar people. But you cannot be satisfied, short of God Himself making it known to you: you want an immediate testimony from His blessed mouth, and nothing but that can satisfy you; and when He sheds abroad His love in your soul, it will give you peace and comfort, and nothing short of that can.

But remember, there is no middle place. How glad thousands would be if there were a place betwixt heaven and hell! O! could they but find purgatory to be true, and have some medium spot! "They are not good enough," say they, "for heaven; but surely they are not bad enough for hell!" O, could they but find some place betwixt the two! But there is none. There is a great gulf fixed Lu 16:26 between Abraham and Dives: there is no intermediate spot. It is either a peculiar people ordained to eternal glory, or a people foreordained to everlasting perdition; it is either being interested in the love and blood of the Redeemer, or it is being under the tremendous wrath and curse of God to all eternity; it is either standing complete in Christ, wrapped up in His righteousness and washed in His blood, or it is to howl in torments through endless ages; it is either to be blessedly caught up into the bosom of God, or thrust down into the habitations of the damned.

And therefore, there being such a tremendous gulf betwixt the one and the other, it will make the child of God quake at times, and fear, and tremble to the centre, whether he has an evidence that God is his Father, that Christ is his Elder Brother and that the Holy Ghost is his Teacher. But he will never get any solid satisfaction till God Himself drops a testimony from His own mouth, gives him the spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father, unveils His face in Christ Jesus, and seals blood and love in his conscience. Then he enters into his rest, and feels the peace of God which passeth all understanding, Php 4:7 he is sealed as an heir of God and joint heir with Christ, Ro 8:17 and when he dies he will for ever be with Him whom his soul loves.