

Psalm 65—Election and the True Church, Jew and Gentile

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Psalm 65

This psalm is composed both of petition and thanksgiving. It contains a prediction of the Gentiles being called to the common faith, but is principally occupied with praising God for the fatherly care which He exercises over His Church, and the benefits which flow from it. The Psalmist prays particularly that God would continue His former kindness to the Jewish people. Two instances of the Divine goodness are specified—the powerful defense extended to their land, and the enriching of it with so many blessings.

To the chief musician, a Psalm of David.

PSALM 65:1-3

1. Praise waits for You, O Lord! in Zion; and to You shall the vow be performed. 2. O You who hears prayer! Unto You shall all flesh come. 3. Words of iniquity have prevailed against me: our transgressions You shall purge them away.

1. *Praise waiteth for thee, O God! in Zion.* Literally it runs, *Praise is silent to thee*, but the verb has been metaphorically rendered first, *to be at rest*, then *to wait*. The meaning of the expression is that God's goodness to His people is such as to afford constantly new matter of praise. It is diffused over the whole world, but specially shown to the Church. Besides, others who do not belong to the Church of God, however abundantly benefits may be showered on them, see not from where they come, and riot in the blessings which they have received without any acknowledgement of them. But the main thing meant to be conveyed by the Psalmist is, that thanksgiving is due to the Lord for His goodness shown to His Church and people. The second clause of the verse is to the same effect, where he says, *unto thee shall the vow be performed*; for while he engages on the part of the people to render due acknowledgement, his language implies that there would be ever remaining new grounds of praise.

With the verse which we have been now considering, that which follows stands closely connected, asserting that God hears the prayers of His people. This forms a reason why the vow should be paid to Him, since God never disappoints His worshippers, but crowns their prayers with a favorable answer. Thus, what is stated last, is first in the natural order of consideration. The title here given to God carries with it a truth of great importance, That the answer of our prayers is secured by the fact, that in rejecting them He would in a certain sense deny His own nature.

The Psalmist does not say, that God has heard prayer in this or that instance, but gives Him the name of the hearer of prayer, as what constitutes an abiding part of His glory, so that He might as soon deny Himself as shut His ear to our petitions. Could we only impress this on our minds, that it is something peculiar to *God*, and inseparable from Him, to hear prayer, it would inspire us with unflinching confidence. The power of helping us He can never lack, so that nothing can stand in the way of a successful result from our supplications.

What follows in the verse is also well worthy of our attention, that *all flesh shall come* to God. None could venture into His presence without a persuasion of His being open to entreaty; but when He anticipates our fears, and comes forward declaring that prayer is never offered to Him in vain, the door is thrown wide for the admission of all. The hypocrite and the ungodly, who

pray under the constraint of present necessity, are not heard; for they cannot be said to come to God, when they have no faith founded on his word, but a mere vague expectation of a chance issue. Before we can approach God acceptably in prayer, it is necessary that His promises should be made known to us, without which we can have no access to Him, as is evident from the words of the apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:12), where he tells us, that all who would come to God must first be endued with such a faith in Christ as may animate them with confidence.

From this we may infer, that no right rule of prayer is observed in the Papacy, when they pray to God in a state of suspense and doubt. Invaluable is the privilege which we enjoy by the Gospel, of free access unto God.

When the Psalmist uses the expression, *all flesh*, he intimates by these few words that the privilege which was now peculiar to the Jews, would be extended to all nations. It is a prediction of Christ's future kingdom.

3. *Words of iniquity have prevailed against me.* He does not complain of the people being assailed with calumny, but is to be understood as confessing that their sins were the cause of any interruption which had taken place in the communication of the divine favor to the Jews. The passage is parallel with that, "The ear of the Lord is not heavy that it cannot hear, but our iniquities have separated between us and Him" (Isaiah 59:1).

David imputes it to his own sins and those of the people, that God, who was accustomed to be liberal in His help, and so gracious and kind in inviting their dependence on Him, had withdrawn for a time His divine countenance.

First, he acknowledges his own personal guilt; afterwards, like Daniel 9:5, he joins the whole nation with himself. And this truth is introduced by the Psalmist with no design to dampen confidence in prayer, but rather to remove an obstacle standing in the way of it, as none could draw near to God unless convinced that He would hear the unworthy. It is probable that the Lord's people were at that time suffering under some token of the divine displeasure, since David seems here to struggle with some temptation of this kind. He evidently felt that there was a sure remedy at hand, for no sooner has he referred to the subject of guilt, than he recognizes the prerogative of God to pardon and expiate it.

The verse before us must be viewed in connection with the preceding, and as meaning, that though their iniquities merited their being cast out of God's sight, yet they would continue to pray, encouraged by His readiness to be reconciled to them. We learn from the passage that God will not be entreated of us, unless we humbly supplicate the pardon of our sins. On the other hand, we are to believe firmly in reconciliation with God being procured through gratuitous remission. Should He at any time withdraw His favor, and frown upon us, we must learn by David's example to rise to the hope of the expiation of our sins.

The reason of his using the singular number, in the confession which he makes of sin, may be, that as king he represented the whole people, or that he intended, like Daniel, to exhort them each to an individual and particular examination and confession of his own guilt. We know how apt hypocrites are to hide their personal sin, under a formal acknowledgement of their share in the general transgression.

But David, from no affectation of humility, but from deep inward conviction, begins with himself, and afterwards includes others in the same charge.

PSALM 65:4-8

4. Blessed is the man whom You have chosen, and have brought near You; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, even of the sanctuary of Your palace. 5. Terrible things in righteousness will You answer to us, O God of our salvation! the hope of all the ends of the earth, and the far off places of the sea. 6. By His strength setting fast the mountains, being girded with power. 7. Stilling the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the nations. 8. They also that dwell in the ends of the earth shall fear at Your signs; You shalt make the outgoings of the evening and morning to rejoice.

4. *Blessed is the man whom thou hast chosen.* Having already acknowledged that the people had separated themselves from God by their sins, and forfeited all right to be heard, he now takes refuge in the free grace of God, which secures the remission of sin among other blessings. He thus casts an additional light on what he had said on the point of guilt being purged away, by pointing to the cause of God, as being favorable to poor sinners, which can only be found in His fatherly love leading Him to welcome them into His presence, however undeserving. That pardon which we daily receive flows from our adoption, and on it also are all our prayers founded. How could the sinner venture into the sight of God, to obtain reconciliation with Him, were he not persuaded of His being a Father?

In the words before us, David does not speak of the grace of God as reaching to the Gentiles, (which he had done in a preceding part of the psalm), but in terms which apply only to the times in which he wrote. **The Church of God was confined to the Jews, and they only were admitted into the sanctuary; whereas now, when the distinction has been abolished, and other nations called to the same privilege, we are all at liberty to approach Him with familiarity.** Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), who has united in one those who were far off, and those who were near.

What has been now said may show at once the scope of the Psalmist. The Church and chosen people of God being in possession of the promise of the remission of sin, he calls those blessed whom God has included within that number, and introduced into the enjoyment of such a distinguished privilege. His language intimates, that **the election did not at that time terminate on all; for he insists upon it as the special prerogative of the Jews, that they had been chosen by God in preference to the other nations.** Were it supposed that man could do anything to anticipate the grace of God, the election would cease to be with God Himself, although the right and power of it are expressly ascribed to Him. But the Jews had no excellency above others, except in the one point of having enjoyed the distinguishing favor of God.

The middle wall of partition is now broken down, that the Gentiles might be called in. It is evident, however, that all are not alike called; and observation proves the ignorance of those who will assert that the grace of God is extended to all in common, without any choice exerted on His part. **Can any reason be imagined why God should not call all alike, except it be that His sovereign election distinguishes some from others? Faith and prayer may be means for procuring us an interest in the grace of God; but the source from which it flows is not within but without us.** There is a blessedness in exercising trust upon God, and embracing His promises—a blessedness experienced when, through faith in Christ the Mediator, we apprehend Him as our Father, and direct our prayers to Him in that character; **but before this faith and prayer can have any existence, it must be supposed that we who are estranged from God by nature have been brought near by an exercise of His favor. We are near Him, not as having anticipated His grace, and come to Him of ourselves, but because, in His condescension, He has stretched out His hand as far as hell itself to reach us. To speak more properly, He first elects us, and then testifies His love by calling us.**

It is noticeable, also, that though God separated the seed of Abraham to be a peculiar people, entitled as the circumcision to a place in His temple, **there can be no question that David recognized a distinction even among those who were Jews, all not having been the subjects of God's effectual calling, nor yet properly entitled to a place in His temple.**

The Psalmist alludes, indeed, to the outward sanctuary, when he speaks of the Jews as chosen to approach God; but we must remember (what was brought under our attention in Psalm 15:1 and Psalm 24:3) that all were not real members of the Church who trod the court of the temple, but that the great qualifications necessary were the pure heart and the clean hands.

Accordingly, we must understand by those brought near to God, such as present themselves before Him in the exercise of genuine faith, and not such as merely occupy a place in his temple as to outward appearance. But, again, the being chosen, and the being called to approach God, are two things mentioned here together, to correct any such vain idea as that the sheep of God's flock are allowed to wander at will for any length of time, and not brought into the fold. This is one way by which our gratuitous adoption is evidenced, that we come to the sanctuary under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalmist insists on the fruit springing out of the blessed privilege of which he had spoken, when he adds, that believers *would be satisfied* with the fullness of His temple. Hypocrites may go there, but they return empty and unsatisfied as to any spiritual blessing enjoyed. It is noticeable, that the person is changed in this part of the verse, and that David associates himself with other believers, preferring to speak on this subject from personal experience. We are not to understand that believers are fully replenished with the goodness of God at any one moment; it is conveyed to them gradually; but while the influences of the Spirit are thus imparted in successive measures, each of them is enriched with a present sufficiency, till all be in due time advanced to perfection.

I might remark here, that while it is true, as stated (Psalm 103:5) that "God satisfies our mouth with good things," at the same time it is necessary to remember what is said elsewhere, "Open your mouth, and I will fill it." Our contracted desires is the reason why we do not receive a more copious supply of blessings from God; He sees that we are limited in ourselves, and accommodates the communications of His goodness to the measure of our expectations. By specifying particularly the *goodness of the sanctuary*, the Psalmist passes an implied commendation on the outward helps which God has appointed for leading us into the enjoyment of heavenly blessings. In these former times God could have directly stretched out His hand from heaven to supply the wants of His worshippers, but saw fit to satisfy their souls by means of the doctrine of the law, sacrifices, and other rites and external aids to piety. Similar are the means which He employs in the Church still; and though we are not to rest in these, neither must we neglect them.

5. *Terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer to us.* He proceeds to illustrate, although in a somewhat different form, the same point of the blessedness of those who are admitted into the temple of God, and nourished in His house. He declares that God would answer His people by miracles or fearful signs, displaying His power; as if he had said, in deliverances as wonderful as those which He worked for their fathers when they went out of Egypt. It is in no common or ordinary manner that God has preserved His Church, but with terrible majesty.

It is well that this should be known, and the people of God taught to sustain their hopes in the most apparently desperate exigencies. The Psalmist speaks of the deliverances of God as specially enjoyed by the Jewish nation, but adds, that He was *the hope of the ends of the earth*, even to the world's remotest extremities. Hence it follows, that the grace of God was to be extended to the Gentiles.

6. *By His strength setting fast the mountains.* For the sake of illustration, he instances the power of God seen in the general fabric of the world. In these times it sounded as a new and strange truth to say that the Gentiles should be called to the same hope with the Jews. To prove that it was not so incredible as they were apt to conceive, the Psalmist very properly calls attention to the Divine power apparent in all parts of the world. He instances the mountains rather than the plains, because the immense masses of earth, and the lofty rocks which they present, convey a more impressive idea of the Godhead.

Interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning of the verse which follows. Some think that the mark of similitude must be supplied before the first word of the sentence, and that it is meant to be said that God stills the tumults of men when raging in their insolent attempts, as He stills the agitations of the sea. Others understand the first part of the verse to be a metaphorical declaration of what is plainly stated in the close. I would take the words simply as they stand, and consider that in the first member of the verse, David adverts to the illustration of the divine power which we have in the sea, and in the second to that which we have in His operations among men. His strength is shown in calming the waves and tempestuous swellings of the ocean. It is put forth also in quelling tumults which may have been raised by the people.

8. *They also that dwell, etc.* By the *signs* referred to, we must evidently understand those signal and memorable works of the Lord which bear the impress of His glorious hand. It is true, that the minutest and lowliest objects, whether in the heavens or on the earth, reflect to some extent the glory of God; but the name mentioned emphatically applies to miracles, as affording a better display of the divine majesty. So striking would be the proofs of God's favor to His Church, that, as the Psalmist here intimates to us, they would constrain the homage and wonder of the most distant and barbarous nations.

In the latter part of the verse, if we take the interpretation suggested by some, nothing more is meant, than that when the sun rises in the morning, men are refreshed by its light; and again, that when the moon and stars appear at night, they are relieved from the gloom into which they must otherwise have been sunk. Were this interpretation adopted, a preposition must be understood; as if it had been said, You make men to rejoice *on account of*, or *by* the rising of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars. But the words, as they stand, convey a sense which is sufficiently appropriate without having recourse to any addition. It was said, that in consequence of the wonders done by the Lord, fear would spread itself over the uttermost parts of the earth; and the same thing is now asserted of the joy which they would shed abroad: from the rising to the setting sun, men would rejoice in the Lord, as well as fear Him.

PSALM 65:9-13

9. You have visited the earth, and watered it; You have greatly enriched it; the river of God is full of waters: You will prepare their corn, for so You have provided for it. **10.** You saturate its furrow, You make the rain to fall into them; You moisten it with showers; You bless the buddings forth of it. **11.** You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths will drop fatness. **12.** They drop on the dwellings of the wilderness, and the hills shall be girded about with gladness; **13.** The pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys are covered with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

9. *Thou hast visited the earth, and watered it.* This and the verbs which follow denote action continually going forward, and may therefore be rendered in the present tense. The exact meaning of the second verb in the sentence has been disputed. Some derive it from the verb signifying *to desire*; and giving this meaning, that God visits the earth after it has been made dry and thirsty by long drought. Others derive it from the verb signifying *to give drink*. This seems the most natural interpretation—*Thou visitest the earth by watering it*. It suits the connection

better, for it follows, *thou plentifully enrichest it*, an expression obviously added by way of amplification. Whether the Psalmist speaks of Judea only, or of the world at large, is a point as to which different opinions may be held. I am disposed myself to think, that although what he says applies to the earth generally, he refers more particularly to Judea, as the former part of the psalm has been occupied with recounting the kindness of God to His own Church and people more especially. This view is confirmed by what is added, *the stream or river of God is full of water*. Some take the *river of God* to mean a great or mighty river, but such a rendering is harsh and overstrained, and on that supposition, *rivers*, in the plural number, would have been the form of expression used. I consider that he singles out the small rivulet of Siloah, and sets it in opposition to the natural rivers which enrich other countries, intending an allusion to the word of Moses (Deuteronomy 11:10) that the land which the Lord their God should give to His people would not be as the land of Egypt, fertilized by the overflowings of the Nile, but a land drinking water of the rain of heaven.

Or we may suppose that he calls the rain itself metaphorically *the river of God*. The words must, at any rate, be restricted to Judea, as by *the pastures or dwellings of the wilderness*, we are also to understand the more dry and uncultivated districts, called in Scripture “the hill country.” But while it is the kindness of God to His own people which is here more particularly celebrated as being better known, we are bound, in whatever part of the world we live, to acknowledge the riches of the Divine goodness seen in the earth’s fertility and increase. It is not of itself that it brings forth such an inexhaustible variety of fruits, but only in so far as it has been fitted by God for producing the food of man. Accordingly, there is a propriety and force in the form of expression used by the Psalmist when he adds, that *corn is provided for man, because the earth has been so prepared by God*; which means, that the reason of that abundance with which the earth teems, is its having been expressly formed by God in His fatherly care of the great household of mankind, to supply the wants of His children.

10. *Thou dost saturate its furrows.* Some take the verbs as being in the optative mood, and construe the words as a prayer. But there can be little doubt that David still continues the strain of thanksgiving, and praises God for moistening and saturating the earth with rains that it may be fitted for producing fruit. By this he would signify to us, that the whole order of things in nature shows the fatherly love of God, in condescending to care for our daily sustenance.

He multiplies his expressions when speaking of a part of the divine goodness, which many have wickedly and impiously disparaged. It would seem as if the more perspicacity men have in observing second causes in nature, they will rest in them the more determinedly, instead of ascending by them to God. Philosophy ought to lead us upwards to Him, the more that it penetrates into the mystery of His works; but this is prevented by the corruption and ingratitude of our hearts; and as those who pride themselves in their acuteness, avert their eye from God to find the origin of rain in the air and the elements, it was the more necessary to awaken us out of such a spirit.

11. *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.* Some read— *Thou crownest the year OF thy goodness*; as if the Psalmist meant that the fertile year had a peculiar glory attached to it, and were crowned, so to speak, by God. Thus, if there was a more abundant crop or vintage than usual, this would be the crown of the year. And it must be granted that God does not bless every year alike. Still there is none but what is crowned with some measure of excellency; and for that reason it would seem best to retain the simpler rendering of the words, and view them as meaning that the Divine goodness is apparent in the annual returns of the season. The Psalmist further explains what he intended, when he adds, that *the paths of God dropped fatness*—using this as a metaphorical term for *the clouds*, upon which God rides, as upon chariots, as we read in Psalm 104:3.

The earth derives its fruitfulness from the sap or moisture; this comes from the rain, and the rain from the clouds. With a singular gracefulness of expression, these are therefore represented as dropping fatness, and this because they are the paths or vehicles of God; as if he had said, that, wherever the Deity walked there flowed down from His feet fruits in endless variety and abundance.

He amplifies this goodness of God, by adding, that His fatness drops even upon the wilder and more uncultivated districts. The *wilderness* is not to be taken here for the absolute waste where nothing grows, but for such places as are not so well cultivated, where there are few inhabitants, and where, notwithstanding, the Divine goodness is even more illustrated than elsewhere in dropping down fatness upon the tops of the mountains.

Notice is next taken of *the valleys* and level grounds, to show that there is no part of the earth overlooked by God, and that the riches of His liberality extend over all the world. The variety of its manifestation is commended when it is added, that *the valleys* and lower grounds *are clothed with flocks*, as well as with corn. He represents inanimate things as rejoicing, which may be said of them in a certain sense, as when we speak of the fields smiling, when they refresh our eye with their beauty. It may seem strange, that he should first tell us, that they *shout for joy*, and then add the feebler expression, that *they sing*; interposing, too, *they shout for joy*, YEA, *they also sing*. The verb, however, admits of being taken in the future tense, *they shall sing*, and this denotes a continuation of joy, that they would rejoice, not only one year, but through the endless succession of the seasons. I may add, what is well known, that in Hebrew the order of expression is frequently inverted in this way.

The true church is mingled among the false professors of God in this world, who often dominate the churches.

Psalm 125:5

“But those who turn aside into their crooked paths, the LORD will make them walk with the workers of iniquity. But there shall be peace upon Israel.”

I have no doubt that the Psalmist here speaks of hypocrites, who are so hardened by temporary impunity, as to claim to themselves a place among the holiest of men, because God exercises forbearance towards them.

Not only do we see the good mingled with the bad in the world, but we also behold on the barn-floor of the Lord the wheat lying hidden under the chaff and refuse. In this dubious and confused state of matters, the bad are elated with pride, as if they were among the best of God’s servants. We ought therefore to pray that God would drag them into the light, and, with the workers of iniquity, thrust them down into the punishment which they have deserved.

The true Israel of God will dwell in peace.

The consequence is that *peace*, which the Prophet desires may be the privilege of Israel. He does not speak generally of all the race of Abraham, according to the flesh; he rather wishes that the Church of God may be purged of hypocrites, who occupy a place in her, until God lift up His hand to judgment. On this account I have said, that the peace of the Church springs from this—that God, while executing His just vengeance upon feigned and counterfeit Israelites, who rend and tear in pieces her bowels, gathers together the upright in heart, and openly shows by His blessing the fatherly love which He bears towards them.