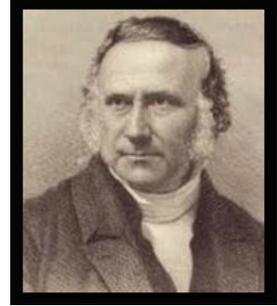


What Can I Do?



In a pleasant interview with a young woman of my congregation, who had recently been led to a hope in Christ, she particularly desired me to see her brother. She had had some little conversation with him, and thought he would be glad of an opportunity to speak with me, for he had some difficulties which she thought troubled him. I immediately requested the favor of seeing him, and in a few moments he came to me. Said I,—

“I asked to see you, sir, because I wished to speak with you on the subject of religion. Have you been considering that subject much?”

“Yes sir, a good deal, lately.”

“And have you prayed about it much?”

“I have prayed sometimes.”

“And have you renounced sin, and accepted the salvation which God offers you through Christ?”

“No, I don’t think I have.”

“Don’t you think you ought to?”

“Yes, if it was not for one thing I would.”

” What thing is that?”

“The doctrine of election.”

“How does that doctrine hinder you?”

“Why, if that doctrine is true, I can do nothing.”

“What can you do if it is not true?”

“Why, I don’t know,” said he, hesitatingly, “but what have I to do? I can do nothing. It is not my business to interfere with God’s

determinations; if he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, as the Catechism says he has.”

“Well, do you think he has?”

“Yes!” said he, (with an accent of much impatience.)

I then tried very carefully to explain to him our duty, our freedom of will, our accountability, God’s gracious offers of both pardon and assistance; and that God’s secret foreordination is no rule of duty to us, and can be no hindrance to our duty or salvation. As I thus went on in the mildest and most persuasive manner I could, his countenance changed, he appeared vexed and angry, and finally, in the most impudent and passionate manner, exclaimed,—

“I don’t want to hear any such stuff as that! If God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, what have I to do?”

“Just what He tells you to do,” said I.

“I can do nothing,” he replied furiously.

“Did you eat your breakfast this morning, sir?”

“Yes, to be sure I did!”

“How could you do it, if God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass? you can do nothing. Did you eat your dinner to-day?”

“Yes, to be sure; I don’t go without my dinner.”

“What did you eat your dinner for, if God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, as you say he has? What have you to do? You can do nothing. Do you mean to go to bed to-night?”

“Yes; I shall try.”

“What will you ‘try’ for? What have you to do? You can do nothing. If God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, it is not your business to interfere with God’s determinations. Will you answer me one question more?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you say ‘yes?’ What have you to do? You can do nothing. God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, and you have no business to interfere with his determinations.”

He appeared to be confused, if not convinced; and after a few more words, I asked him if he could tell me plainly what he himself meant, when he said he could do nothing.

“No,” said he, “I don’t know what I mean.”

“Can you explain to me how, in your view, the foreordination of God makes you incapable of doing anything, or hinders you?”

He hesitated for some moments, and then answered,—

“No, I am not able to tell anything about it.”

I then carefully explained to him his duty, his freedom of will, his accountability to God, and earnestly strove to persuade him to dismiss his cavillings and come to immediate repentance, as God requires, and as a rebel against God ought to do, while mercy solicits him to salvation. He seemed to be somewhat affected; and when I explained to him more fully that the foreordination of God did not take away his liberty, power, or accountability, he appeared to be convinced. I invited him to come to me, if he ever found any more trouble or hindrance, or difficulty of mind, and tell me what it was. But he never came. He frequently muttered some objection to his sister, on the ground of predestination; but he never afterwards introduced that subject in conversation with me. Yet I was not able to persuade him to be a Christian; and now, after fifteen years more of his life have passed away, he still remains in his sins; entirely neglecting all public worship, manifestly a hardened sinner.

It is not safe for a sinner to trifle with Divine truth. The falsehood, insincerely uttered as an excuse, comes to be believed as a truth. Sad state,—given over to believe a lie!