

God's Grace Was Sovereignly Decreed

We have seen that the lost man's condition is so desperate that he cannot save himself or even cooperate with God in his salvation. His case, humanly speaking, is hopeless. If he is ever to be saved, God Himself must decide to reach out and save Him by His own grace and power. The truth that God has decided to reach out and save millions of lost and perishing souls, and that He has decided to do this from eternity past is what I mean by the decree of election. A decree is simply an official royal decision. God is the King of the universe who has made an official royal decision to save a definite number of the human family.

I have found from personal experience that whenever a person speaks or writes on this particular truth of God's Word he is sure to get a response! He will find that his hearers/readers are either passionately in love with this truth, or utterly abhor and reject it. To some people, God's sovereign election is the most wonderful thing that they have ever discovered from the Scriptures. To them, it is like getting saved all over again. To others, it is a devilish doctrine straight out of the pit of hell. I'm sure that as I write upon this theme, you will have a reaction to what I'm writing! I know that I'm taking a risk by bringing up this subject at all. But the reason I do is to fulfill my purpose for writing this booklet. I want you to have a greater appreciation for your salvation than you have ever had before. By understanding and embracing the Biblical teaching on election you will be able to do just that. My only request of you is that you carefully and objectively weigh what the Scriptures teach on this subject. Remember, we do not base our beliefs on human opinion or speculation, but on the clear teaching of the Word of God! Please read with an open and honest heart to see what the Bible says about this subject. I believe you will be glad you did!

One thing's for sure -- you can't avoid this subject if you accept the Bible as the Word of God. The word "chosen" or some derivative thereof is found some 36 times in the New Testament. The word "elect" is found 8 times. The word "predestined" is found 7 times. In all, these words occur over 50 times in the New Testament alone! In fact, when your eyes are opened to see these truths, you begin to see them all through the Bible. You will find them in virtually every book of the New Testament. The truth of sovereign election is not a doctrine that can be avoided; it's in the Bible. A Christian must deal with it in one way or another. It is my intention to help you discover what God means by it, and how to profit from it. In order to do that, let's turn our attention to one of the premier texts on election in the New Testament -- Ephesians 1:3-6.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."

The phrase "He chose" is from the Greek verb "eklegomai" which means "to choose or pick out of." It is in the middle voice which means that God did it for Himself. God chose out of the mass of mankind a people for Himself to display His own glory.

The Preeminence Of Election

In Ephesians 1:3 Paul launches out into a 202 word sentence (in Greek) of praise to God. He tells us that God is to be blessed because He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. What are these blessings? The very first one that is mentioned is the blessing of election. He chose us in Him. Before mentioning our adoption, redemption, forgiveness, inheritance, or sealing Paul mentions election. Why? Because every other blessing is dependent on this one. If a person is not chosen by God to eternal life he will never receive any of these other blessings. Election is the fountain of every other blessing of God. These other blessings have their source in the electing love of God. Election is the source of all subsequent blessings. The whole process of salvation is the unfolding of God's electing love and predestinating purpose. Election depends on God alone; all other blessings depend upon election.

The Author Of Election

Our text informs us that "He" chose us. Who is the He? Verse 3 answers our question by telling us that it was the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The author of election is God the Father. The Bible does not attribute your being chosen to salvation to Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. It is the role of the Father. Peter gives us the same scoop in 1 Peter 1:1-2 by saying that his readers were "chosen by the foreknowledge of *God the Father*." Paul, in 1 Thess. 1:4 states, "knowing, brethren beloved by *God, His* choice of you." Each member of the Blessed Trinity has a role to play in God's eternal plan of salvation. The Father is the architect, the Son purchases the materials, and the Spirit builds the house. The Father chose those who would be saved, Jesus Christ purchased their salvation, and the Holy Spirit infallibly applies the purchased salvation to their lives. If you are one of God's elect, you have God the Father to thank and bless for it!

The Objects Of Election

Our text says, "He chose *us*." Who is Paul talking about? Well, perhaps it would be helpful to note three different kinds of election found in Scripture -- national, vocational, and salvational. National election is seen in God selecting the nation of Israel to fulfill His purposes (Deut. 7:6-8). Vocational election is seen in God selecting different persons such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, the apostles, etc. to fulfill His purposes, by fulfilling a particular function such as leader,

high priest, or apostle. The third type of election found in Scripture is salvational. This is when God chooses individual persons to receive the gift of eternal life. Our text in Ephesians can't be referring to national election because his epistle wasn't written to the nation of Israel. He was writing to the saints and those who were faithful at Ephesus. In fact, the word "us" includes more than just the saints at Ephesus. Paul himself and possibly others must be included in this group. Therefore, the persons who make up the "us" must be particular, individual persons -- not a nation. He also couldn't have been referring to vocational election, because all of the people he wrote to were not apostles, pastors or deacons. The object of election in this text is not a nation, nor a people called to a specific task, but rather God's people scattered throughout Asia Minor whom He chose to eternal life. When we read "He chose", it implies that not all are included. To choose implies that some are selected while the rest are left.

The Sphere Of Election

Our text clearly states, "He chose us *in Him*." This decree of the Father does not take place apart from Christ. It is accomplished only in Him, by virtue of His work. Jesus Christ and His work are the means by which election becomes effectual in human history. Election alone saves no one. It determines the who, but not the how of salvation. The cross of Christ carries out the Father's eternal plan. That's why, after describing the Father's role in election in Ephesians 1:4-6, the apostle Paul goes on to describe Christ and His work in carrying out the Father's plan in Ephesians 1:7-12.

The Timing Of Election

When were these individuals chosen to salvation? Again, we find the answer to this fascinating question in our text as it declares, "He chose us in Him *before the foundation of the world*." Before the universe existed, God Almighty had already laid out a plan which included the exact number and identity of every person He would ever save!

Rev. 17:8 "And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life *from the foundation of the world*, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."

2 Timothy 1:9 "who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus *from all eternity*."

2 Thessalonians 2:13 "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you *from the beginning* for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of

My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you *from the foundation of the world.*"

These texts of Scripture show us that God does everything in time according to a preconceived plan, or as the Scripture puts it, "He works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). From eternity past, the whole plan of redemption with all its details and results was designed of God. Thus, all is certain. There is no possibility of failure or a change of plan.

Augustus Toplady, the author of the well-known hymn "Rock Of Ages" and popular pastor of the 18th century in England wrote these words: "The book of life, or decree of election, is the marriage-register of the saints in which their everlasting espousal to Christ stands indelibly recorded by the pen of God's free and eternal love. The elect were betrothed to Christ from everlasting in the covenant of grace. They are actually married to Him and join hands with Him in conversion, but they are not taken home to the bridegroom's house until death dismisses them from the body." The famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon once quipped, "I'm glad that God chose me before I was born, because I'm sure He wouldn't have chosen me afterward!"

The Results Of Election

The results of God's eternal decree of election are two-fold:

1. That We Should Be Holy And Blameless Before Him: This wonderful two-sided blessing begins to take place at the moment of our justification. When a sinner believes on Jesus Christ, God clothes him in His righteous garments. It is as though he had never sinned, but is instead covered by the righteousness of Christ! Nevertheless, this blessing will not be completely fulfilled until we are glorified in His presence. Then we shall be absolutely holy before Him. His blazing eyes of holiness will not be able to detect any sin in us at all! This is the truth of Ephesians 5:25-27 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be *holy and blameless.*" That is the culmination of what God has been driving at in our lives all along -- our absolute and complete conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please also note that holiness is a fruit of election, not the cause of it. He chose us that we should be holy, not because we already were! God doesn't choose us because we are holier than others, or because He knows we will be. He chooses so that we will become holy and blameless before Him!

2. That We Should Be Adopted As His Sons: Adoption is the act of God whereby He brings men from Adam's ruined family into His own, making them His own children, and granting them all the rights and privileges of His own sons. All men are born into the family of Satan. No one has a right to be in God's family. However, God, of His own mere mercy and grace decided that He would not permit the whole world to perish in hell, but would adopt a multitude

of sinners into His family, conform them to the image of His Son, and bring them to eternal glory! Romans 8:29 teaches us this same truth where it states, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren."

The Motive Of Election

Our text in Ephesians 1 tells us, "*In love* He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Here we are told why God chose us to be holy and blameless and to be His adopted children. It was because of His eternal, unchanging and sovereign electing love. God loves all His creatures with a general love of benevolence. But He loves His elect with a special, discriminating love which is much higher and greater still. It is interesting to note how often in Scripture the love of God and His decree of election are coupled together.

Colossians 3:12 "And so, as those who have been *chosen of God*, holy and *beloved*, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

1 Thessalonians 1:4 "knowing, brethren *beloved* by God, His *choice* of you."

2 Thessalonians 2:13 "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren *beloved by the Lord*, because *God has chosen you* from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

Augustus Toplady in referring to this great theme of God's electing love wrote, "God's everlasting love, His decree of election, and eternal covenant of redemption are the three hinges on which the door of man's salvation turns."

The Cause Of Election

What was the reason God chose some and passed by others? Ephesians 1:5 tells us that it was "according to the kind intention of His will." The words "kind intention" mean good pleasure. He chose us according to the good pleasure of His will. At first glance this may seem as if God were arbitrary and capricious, taking delight in choosing some and damning others. However, never view election as if God were up in heaven rolling dice to see who gets chosen. He's not a celestial child crying gleefully, "eenie, meenie, miney, moe!" If you are one of His elect, it's not just because you got lucky! No, luck had nothing to do with it. The kind intention of His will had everything to do with it. God had a reason for choosing whom He did. We don't know what that reason was, but we do know that it had nothing to do with us. The reason is in God alone, not those He chose. God had a purpose and has followed that purpose in choosing you! He hasn't seen fit to fill us in on all the details of that purpose. We must simply trust Him in those things He hasn't fully revealed to us.

Notice that His choice was according to His *good* pleasure. A person may fully intend to go to the dentist and also to plant a beautiful rose garden. Both are decisions of his will, but the latter alone is a matter of delight to him. Likewise, God's choice to save you was of His good pleasure! He delights in it! We get a hint of this in Luke 10:21 where Jesus rejoices greatly in the Holy Spirit and says, "I praise Thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was *well-pleasing* in Thy sight."

Did you notice that in our entire text, nothing is stated about the sinner's will. We are not told that God chose us according to our will. Divine election is not conditioned upon our faith, repentance or good works. These things are the fruits of election, not the root. Paul, as emphatically as he possibly could stated this truth in Romans 9:16 by saying, "so then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

The Goal Of Election

What was God's goal in this entire matter? Well, according to Ephesians 1:6 it was all for the praise of the glory of His grace. You see, God's glory is the goal of all He does. We see this quite clearly all the way through this paragraph. In verses 3-6 Paul describes the work of God the Father, and caps it all off by saying it was "to the praise of the glory of His grace." In verses 7-12 Paul describes the work of Jesus Christ, and sums it up by saying it was "to the praise of His glory." In verses 13-14 Paul describes the work of the Holy Spirit and says it was "to the praise of His glory." In this entire section of Scripture the apostle Paul is calling on us to bless God for His glorious grace! The grace of God shines most resplendently when seen in the light of sovereign election. Oh, how glorious is His grace! From eternity past He has set His love upon us, knowing what rebels and sinners we would be. He chose to have mercy upon us, adopt us into His own family, give us all the rights of legitimate sons, grant us an inheritance, wipe out all our sins, and make us holy and blameless before Him forever! It is absolutely incredible! John Calvin put it this way, "St. Paul couples glory and grace together so that we should be ravished when we see how God has drawn us out of the bottom of hell to open to us the gate of His kingdom and to call us to the heritage of salvation."

Do you agree with Calvin? Are you ravished by the sight of His electing love? I truly hope so! If you are, I think you will agree with me that God's grace is amazing! But perhaps at this point, your mind is full of objections and arguments to what I have been saying. Since that is probably the case, I'll take some time to deal with the most common objections to God's sovereign election.

But Election Is Based On Foreknowledge

The argument goes something like this: "You see, God knew ahead of time that I would choose Him, so He chose me." This argument sounds so good! We love it! We want to believe it! But should we? I believe that this explanation of foreknowledge can't possibly be correct because of the following reasons:

1. This Makes Man Sovereign: If God only chose us because He knew ahead of time that we would choose Him, God hasn't really made a choice at all. He has only said o.k. to our choice of Him. But in contrast with this view, listen to Jesus' words in John 15:16 "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.*" If we are sovereign, then God isn't. But if God's not sovereign, then He's not God, because there is something more authoritative and powerful in the universe than He.

2. This Gives Man The Credit For His Salvation: If my salvation is based on the right use of my free will, then I will have something to boast about in heaven. I will be able to say to the sinner in hell, "the reason I'm up here, and you're down there is because I made the right choice, and you didn't!" But God has devised salvation in such a way that no one will ever be able to boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

3. This Assumes That Man Seeks After God: But the Bible explicitly teaches that he doesn't! Romans 3:11 teaches us "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God."

4. This Makes Salvation A Result Of A Human Work: But the Bible teaches that faith comes from God as a gift (Eph. 2:8-9; 2 Pet. 1:1; John 6:65; Phil. 1:29; Acts 18:27), not as our contribution to salvation. It is those alone who have been appointed to eternal life that believe (Acts 13:48).

5. Foreknowledge Is Spoken Of In Connection With A People -- Not In Connection With Any Action Which People Perform: Notice how foreknowledge is spoken of in Romans 8:29 "For WHOM He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." The text does not say, "For WHAT He foreknew." If foreknowledge was simply the fact that God foreknew our actions, then the verse would have read, "For WHAT He foreknew." But it doesn't read that way. The simple truth is that God's foreknowledge refers to His special, saving love that He has determined to set upon His elect. To "know" in Scripture often has the meaning of to "love" (Amos 3:2; Mt. 7:23; John 10:14; 2 Tim. 1:19). Foreknowledge then, means to forelove. God has determined beforehand to specially love certain people. This, I believe, is what it means that election is based on foreknowledge. It is the same as saying that the motive of election was God's love, as we have previously seen to be the case.

But It Doesn't Seem Fair!

It's hard for me to answer that objection because you might be meaning two different things from that statement. You might mean that it doesn't seem just. Just means to give a man exactly what he deserves. Now let me ask you a question, "Do you really want God to be just?!" If God

were absolutely just with all men, they would all end up in hell! Election does not damn any man who ought to be saved; it only saves many men who ought to be damned! God does no injustice to those who perish. They receive what they rightly deserve.

You may mean, however, by that statement that this would mean that God doesn't give all men exactly the same thing. If that is what you mean, you are absolutely right! Did you decide where you would be born, when you would be born, what parents you would have, what natural gifts you would possess, or whether or not you would hear the gospel? Of course not! God has never told us that He is going to give all men exactly the same thing. You will search your Bible in vain in an attempt to find that God has declared that He is fair. Yes, He is just, but He's not fair. He reserves the right to do as He pleases with His own (Mt. 20:15). We must remember that God is the Creator, and the Potter, and has the right to do what He pleases with His creatures.

But What About The Biblical Teaching On Free Will?

What biblical teaching? There isn't any! The phrase "free will" is not found in the Bible, except as a reference to the free will offerings of the Old Testament and once to Philemon allowing Onesimus to stay and minister to Paul in jail (Philemon 14). The "whoever will" passages don't tell us sinners have the ability to come to Christ. They merely tell us that if they do they shall never perish but have eternal life (John 3:16; Rev.22:17). Many people think that free will is the ability to repent and believe on Christ in their own strength, but as we have already seen, the Scriptures teach the exact opposite. A man becomes willing in the day of God's power (Ps.110:3). A man can only choose according to his nature. Until or unless God changes a man's nature, he cannot choose Christ.

But I've Never Heard This Teaching Before!

The objector may say, "This doctrine seems like something new and novel. I don't know anybody else who believes it." That may very well be true. But it hasn't always been true. In fact, for the first 200 years after the reformation, this teaching was included in the creeds and confessions of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Anglican and Congregational churches. It can be found in the Waldensian Creed of the 1400's, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism of the 1560's, the 39 Articles of the Church of England (1562), the Helvetic Confession (1564), the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Savoy Declaration, the London Confession of Faith (1689), and the New Hampshire Confession (1833).

The truth of sovereign election has been believed and taught by great men of God throughout church history including Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Hugh Latimer, William Tyndale, John Owen, John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, George Whitefield, Jonathan

Edwards, David Brainerd, Isaac Watts, John Newton, William Carey, Robert Murray McCheyne, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Donald Barnhouse, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, A.W. Pink, and R.C. Sproul.

But This Is Fatalism!

No, fatalism is the belief that the affairs of men are controlled either by whimsical sub-deities (the Fates) or impersonal forces of chance. Sovereign election is rooted in the character of a personal and righteous God. Let me ask you, "would you rather have your destiny in the hands of an impersonal, cold force called Fatalism, or in the hands of a loving and gracious God?"

But Doesn't The Bible Say That God Desires All Men To Be Saved?

Yes it does. It states that very thing in 1 Timothy 2:4, and in 2 Peter 3:9. But neither text requires us to understand "all men" to refer to all men without exception. The context of 1 Timothy 2 is Paul exhorting Timothy to have the church pray for "all men" (verse 1). Does Paul want Timothy to have the church pray specifically and personally for every person in the world?! I don't think so. Rather, he probably means "all men without distinction." Pray even for those wicked kings in authority who are persecuting you, as well as the common man of the street who possesses very little authority. Pray for white collar as well as blue collar workers. Pray for all kinds, sorts, and races of men. Probably, the apostle has the same thought in mind in verse 4 when he tells us that God desires "all men" to be saved. God desires all kinds of men without distinction to be saved. He is not only concerned with the Jewish nation, but desires to save a people out of all the different tribes, peoples, tongues and nations of the world. If the apostle Paul does mean "all men" to refer to all men without exception here, it still does not prove that He has not decreed the salvation only of the elect. The text says "desires", not decrees, determines, appoints, or ordains. Thus, it is possible that Paul meant to say that God actually desires to save all men (even though we know that He has not decided to do so). Either way, no harm is done to the Biblical teaching of election that we have seen thus far.

The other text is found in 2 Peter 3:9. In that text Peter declares, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." I believe the key to understanding this text is found in those two words "toward you." Who is God patient toward? We find out in 2 Peter 1:1 that Peter was writing to "those who have obtained a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ." In other words, Peter is saying that God is patient toward His elect, not wishing for any (of them) to perish, but for all (of them) to come to repentance. God is waiting to send Christ back to this world until the last elected individual has come to repentance.

But This Doctrine Will Cut The Nerve Of Evangelism!

You may be thinking that if you believed all of this, you would never witness to a lost person again! Why should you -- they will be saved whether you witness to them or not! I think you greatly misunderstand God's means, if that is what you are thinking. You see, God not only foreordains the end of salvation, but also the means to that end. Not only has God chosen to save a particular people, but He has chosen to save them through the witness of His people! Far from causing us to cease evangelizing, this truth gives us the certainty that our efforts will be successful. If there were no such thing as election, there would be no converts! Jesus could say in John 10:16, "And I *have* other sheep, which are not of this fold; I *must* bring them also, and *they shall* hear My voice; and *they shall* become one flock with one shepherd." Jesus knew that He had sheep out there who weren't saved yet, but who **MUST** be saved because of His Father's eternal decree! To prove that this truth will not cut the nerve of evangelism, all we have to do is take a look at church history to see that some of the most aggressive and effective evangelists, pastors and missionaries (George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, Charles Spurgeon) have believed this great truth.

Oh the amazing grace of God! I believe that the Biblical teaching on divine election highlights God's amazing grace like few other truths of the Word of God. A friend and fellow pastor in Mississippi, Mark Webb uses the following illustration. He asks you to imagine that you have just got married and are driving away from the church parking lot on your honeymoon. Your new husband turns to you and says, "Honey, I want to share something with you. The first time I ever set eyes on you I decided that one day you'd be mine. I loved you so much. Do you remember when you were just a child and had to have that expensive operation? Everyone thought you were going to die. Your parents didn't know where they were going to get the money, until one day they found a large check in the mail. Well, I'm the one that sent that check. You never knew where it came from, but it was me. As you were growing up you kept getting cards in the mail that said "from your secret admirer." You never realized it, but that was me as well. I determined that I loved you so much that I would do whatever it took to win you." Now ladies, if you heard those words from your husband, would you stomp your feet and shout, "How dare you violate my free will!" Or would you rather say, "That's the loveliest thing I've ever heard in all my life!" I think you would say the latter, and that is exactly what the truth of sovereign election teaches us!

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1/16/96

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