

“CHOSEN BY GOD BEFORE TIME.”

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Scripture Texts: Ephesians 1:3-6; Romans 8:28-32

Introduction.

Some of you may have noticed that there is an election coming up, an election that is trying and troubling the souls of many. It has a lot of Christians wondering where God is in all of this. I have decided to address this in a three part series of sermons on election and elections.

I want to ground our confidence in our sovereign God and to do that I want to begin by reminding you of your personal confidence in God's choosing of you before addressing our national confidence in God choosing our leaders.

As we consider the doctrine of God's choosing or God's election, let's be clear about one thing. We are not talking about an idea that was invented in the sixteenth century. We are not preaching Calvinism, we are preaching the Bible.

Almost all Christians believe and affirm God is sovereign. After all it's crucial to God being God. He personally spoke everything into existence. He has absolute, eternal sovereign power and authority over everything. You ask just about any Christian, "Is God sovereign?" and he will tell you, yes.

But as soon as you ask, "Is God sovereign over who is saved and who is not, or who receives grace and who does not?" all of a sudden there are explanations, "well you see in this particular matter God actually leaves it up to us and well, there is the matter of free will, you know, and well if we weren't free to decide then that would be unfair, and salvation would not be based on love" and well you get my point. God is sovereign over everything except our salvation.

Let's ask *five questions* about election and answer them from Ephesians 1.

What is election?

Election is the action choosing. In a political election the voters are active, exercising their free will according to their own pleasure. The one being elected is passive, waiting for the result or outcome. The one electing is active and the one being elected is passive.

In Scripture, election is the active action of God exercised toward passive mankind. Election is just one aspect of God's total providential control of the entire universe and every detail in it, including all the steps toward our salvation.

Election to salvation is not the only election or choosing in Scripture. There are elect angels (I Tim 5:21). There is election to office or service seen in God's sovereign choice of David as king and in Jesus' choosing the disciples.

There is the election of Abraham and Abraham's descendants to be the chosen nation of Israel. Scripture says Israel's election rested only in God's sovereign choice, as an expression of His covenantal love, serving His own purposes.

But our focus is on election to salvation. Election is the mountain spring from which flows every spiritual blessing that is ours, from which flows our salvation and everything that leads up to and follows from our salvation. This is a glorious stream from which we want to drink deeply.

When did this choosing take place?

Paul specifically says God chose us before we were ever born, in fact before any one was born, before the foundations of the earth were laid. Our destiny was ordained for us before history, before there was any reason on earth to be chosen, before there was anything in us.

Who are elected?

Paul's language is very clearly individual and personal.

Eph. 1:4, He chose us in Christ.

Eph. 1:5, He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

Eph. 1:11, We have obtained an inheritance having been predestined.

Eph. 1:12, We who were the first to hope in Christ.

The elect are a definite number of people chosen out of all of fallen humanity. The number is fixed, it cannot be increased or decreased. It has been determined from before the foundations of the earth. God knows the number and the names of each one written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Those chosen are not more worthy or better or superior. In fact there is no reason in them to be saved.

Ephesians 2:3 we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and ***were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.***

I Corinthians 1:26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28** God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **29** so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

There was no merit, no foreseen faith, no worthiness, nothing but mercy and unconditioned love.

How are they elected?

Some people claim God looked out into the future and saw who would come to faith and based on that foreseen faith, elected them to salvation in Christ. Scripture does not teach that. Why does Scripture say we cannot choose Christ?

Because we are in such bondage to sin that our wills are enslaved. Because of sin our wills are no longer free. Yes, we make choices and decisions, but when it comes to spiritual things we will always and only choose according to the sinful inclinations of our hearts. As a result God must choose us or we will all perish in the just punishment that is our because of our sin. If God did not save some, none would be saved.

Before birth, before good or evil, faith or unbelief, God in accordance with His own good pleasure, chooses one and not the other. Because it pleased Him to do as He wished. His reasons are known only to Him. The reasons are in Him and not in us.

There can be no boasting, no bragging, no pride, no saying I did this or that, or I am better than others. There can be no boasting about faith or intelligence or privilege of birth. There was no cause outside of God.

It is “according to the purpose of his will” (1:5); “according to the riches of his grace” (1:8); “according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (1:11).

I stand before you and the world as a trophy of God’s sheer grace. The only way grace can be grace is if grace is really grace. If we are saved for any other reason then it’s not grace.

How is our election made effective for us?

By means that God sovereignly uses and oversees.

God’s electing love is applied to us in Christ. The Holy Spirit plants the seeds of repentance and faith. The blood of Jesus redeems us from sin and death, forgives our trespasses. God adopts us as His children. Christ’s righteousness and obedience are applied to us.

God uses means like prayer and preaching. Faith comes to us by hearing and hearing by preaching.

People get confused when they forget that God is sovereign over the whole process, means are just as ordained as the ends. That is why all through Scripture there is the call and command to

preach, to teach, to witness, to evangelize, to pray for the salvation of others and to labor in ministries to bring others to Christ. We are all instruments along the path toward the salvation of those whom God has chosen.

Romans 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Notice the misunderstandings about the doctrine that Paul clears up.

First of all, there are those who say that if election is true then we live in a fatalistic or deterministic or mechanistic universe.

This always reminds me of an old Armenian/Calvinist joke I enjoy telling. An Armenian falls down the stairs and says, "I'll have to be more careful and watch my step next time." The Calvinist falls down the stairs and says, "Well, I sure am glad to get that over with."

It's funny but not true. It presents a false caricature of the doctrine of election.

Scripture presents an entirely different picture. Our salvation is the work of a personal God in relationship with personal creatures. Ephesians 1:5 says God predestined us in love to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. Let this be your assurance, it's personal. We are the objects of His affections, dearly loved from before creation.

But some still object to this doctrine and say it makes us puppets or robots, not real persons who can make real choices.

How many of us go through life thinking we are puppets on a stage? None of us view our experience of life and reality that way. So saying that doesn't make it true.

How many of us decided when we would be born or who our parents would be or where we would be born, or our socio-economic status, our birth order, our early experiences, moves, schools, friends, etc.? The absence of those choices doesn't make us robots.

Others object that election destroys human responsibility for sin and sinful choices, and that our choices are not real.

But if we know the whole counsel of Scripture we know that we are treated as free, voluntary beings who make real choices. That God may influence those choices doesn't mean that they are not still genuine human choices.

Is a storm caused by God a real storm? Is a sickness caused by God a real sickness? Is an action or choice God causes me to make a real action? Of course. That God causes choices doesn't of necessity make them not real.

God has made the world and us in such a way that "(1) he ordains all that we do, and (2) we exercise our personal will and make real, voluntary choices" (Grudem, p. 344).

We are real people who make real choices that have real effects on our lives. It is a mystery how the divine and the human work together, but it is a mystery that is a reality.

Philippians 2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Finally, some object, why bother pray for someone else and for their salvation. It is already decided and in God's hands, He doesn't need us.

I have already touched on this. God ordains the means and the ends, the results and the effects. We are called to faithfulness and obedience.

Furthermore, those who deny election seem to be in the more difficult position. How do they pray to a God who is not sovereign and what do they ask Him to do to a person whose will is to be entirely free from external influences.

When I pray for an unbeliever, I plead for God to sovereignly and powerfully move in that person's life, to change their hard heart, to bring forces and events to play in their life such that they will repent and come to faith.

When I pray for myself, I pray, thy will be done, not my will. I plead for God to not just rule, but to overrule. I pray my free and voluntary choices be guided by His Spirit for His glory.

How are we to view this great doctrine of Scripture?

First, we are to praise God and give Him all the glory and the honor that is due His name for accomplishing so great a thing as our salvation.

Ephesians says again and again, that everything God does is for the praise of His glory and grace (vs. 6, 12, 14).

God could have chosen to save all men, He had the power and authority to do so. God could have chosen to save no one, He was under absolutely no obligation to show mercy to anyone, and perfectly justified to show only wrath.

God chose to adopt some as His children in Christ for no earthly or human reason, but solely as an expression of His sovereign choice and His own good pleasure. Our only response is to give

Him glory and praise, and to thank God for our salvation and for saving us. What else do you say to a gift?

No doctrine gives us more cause to fall down in humble worship and gratitude, and to rise up to serve with confident boldness and courage.

Second, we should be humbled. We have done nothing, there is no good in us, we did not influence the decision or effect the outcome. As Paul writes, God did it according to the purpose of His will, according to the riches of His grace, according to the counsel of His will.

No doctrine so clearly strikes at the root of pride and self-centeredness and humanism.

Third, we should be comforted by so many spiritual blessings that are secured for us and that “He ...works all things according to the counsel of His will” (vs. 11). Our comfort is that we are able to fully and completely trust God, trust Him down to the very smallest of details. We are not at the whim of fate, chance or luck; nor are we at the whim of evil powers. The sovereignty of God is the one solid rock in the midst of life, especially when suffering or hardship comes.

No doctrine is more useful and fruitful and comforting to our souls. No doctrine teaches us more clearly who God is and what He is like. This is the ground of our assurance that God has our future firmly in His hands and the future of our nation firmly in His hands.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is to condemn? ... **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Prayer:

Holy, Sovereign, Supreme, Eternal and Unchangeable God, before whom all worlds and nations stand and fall, in the mysterious counsels of your will you rule and reign, you decide and speak and it is accomplished. Before we knew you, you knew us, before we believed you, you gave us belief, before we had faith in Christ, you chose us in Christ to have faith. We exist because of you, we are yours because of you. Have mercy on us and our families and our church, deal with us not according to your wrath or justice, but according to your mercy and compassion. Make us to rest secure in your sovereign love, in the name of Christ and for the sake of Christ and your glory in Him and in His church. Amen.