

“CHOSEN BY GOD IN CHRIST.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Ephesians 1:3-6

Belgic Confession: Article 16

Introduction.

As we return to the Belgic Confession this evening, we pick up at a natural break in the confession. We started with the doctrine about God (Articles 1-13). Then we studied the doctrine about man, his creation and fall (Articles 14-15). Now we turn to the Doctrine of Christ (Articles 16-21).

After Adam's terrible sin God revealed Himself as a Redeemer who had already chosen for His Son a multitude to be saved by His grace.

In Article 17 we will see where God first revealed His redemptive grace and declared His promise to crush Satan. Article 18 tells us how that promise was fulfilled at the incarnation. Article 19 explains how at the incarnation Jesus became both God and man. Article 20 shows how Jesus is God's means of redemption and how in Article 21 He fully satisfied God's wrath for our sins by His atonement in His blood.

It all starts with God, with His will, His purpose, His plan which He initiates and carries out.

Article 16, Chosen by God in Christ.

Many of the doctrines about God have stirred up controversy, but few have stirred up as much as predestination and election. Since it's a difficult doctrine it's important that we handle it with care.

Article 16 starts wisely with a statement about our sin. Any conversation about salvation and redemption should start with sin. If someone tries to get you into an argument about election or predestination, just steer them back to the fundamental issue. We are all of us lost and dead in our sins and without hope apart from Christ.

Remember how the Heidelberg Catechism starts out? First our guilt then God's grace; first our misery then God's mercy.

We believe Scripture teaches that left alone no fallen human being would ever choose God. We are slaves to our sin and there is no desire or inclination to do anything but sin. We have a will, but our will is in bondage to sin so that we only choose sin.

That's why faith is a gift and only those who are given the gift will respond to the Gospel. The elect do choose God, but only after God has first chosen them and given them the ability to choose Him.

Election.

Election simply means selected or chosen. Election refers to God's free and sovereign act of choosing some and not others. Election most clearly reveals the attribute of God's mercy.

Election in Scripture applies only to rational creatures, angels and man.

Concerning angels we read:

I Timothy 5:21 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the *elect angels* I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

Concerning man:

Ephesians 1:3-6 (and countless other texts)

Ephesians 1 says from before the foundations of the earth (eternal); according to His unchangeable will (immutable, sovereign); and for the praise of His glorious grace (glory) God chose us and predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

Election is that expression of the sovereign love of God toward sinners in which He saves and adopts certain people into His family forever. To be elect is to be loved and chosen by God.

Before creation God saw that the human race would fall and He decided that He would redeem some by bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Why did God choose us? The answer is both staggering and humbling. According to the council of His own will. According to His own good pleasure. It's for His glory alone and because of His grace alone.

He took some clay and modeled it into a vessel of mercy in order to show those vessels of mercy the riches of His glory. He did this with our sinfulness and wickedness and rebellious hard hearts fully in mind.

This choice was free, unconditional, without any consideration of any merit or works. God owes no one anything.

I love the doctrine of election. As I thought more about this I questioned myself. Why do I love the doctrine of God's election? Is it because I am one of the elect? It feels nice to be chosen for His team, just as it feels nice out on the playground. Is that why I love this doctrine?

No. I love the doctrine, not because of what it says about me or means about me, but for what it says about God. It glorifies God not me, and whatever glorifies the God I love, I love.

God's choosing and adopting us is a pastoral doctrine. It shows us how great are God's love and grace and mercy.

The doctrine of election is the heart of our Reformed faith but it's not a new doctrine. This doctrine wasn't invented by Calvin or the Reformers. They were simply preaching and teaching Scripture.

From Genesis to Revelation God's sovereign electing grace is written on nearly every page.

God chose Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees.

God chose Isaac over Ishmael.

God chose Jacob over Esau.

God chose Judah over the other eleven brothers and tribes.

God chose Israel over all the other nations.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the Lord loves you.

God chose David over his seven older brothers.

Jesus chose His disciples.

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 abide

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

The Apostles wrote freely and frequently of this truth.

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

The story of Scripture is a story of divine sovereign initiative and choice. And it's well summed up in Ephesians.

What is Paul trying to do in this passage? I'll tell you what he is trying to do. This passage is the work of an arsonist. Paul is trying to start a fire. Every phrase is another log, another gallon of gas, until he has piled up and soaked enough timber to get a huge blazing inferno raging. There's a fire burning in this man and, driven by the wind of the Holy Spirit, he wants to stir up something really big in Ephesus (and Lynden). He is igniting a fuse and fanning the flames.

“He chose us in Him.” Three pronouns. He chose us in Him. God is the one who puts us and Christ together. He chose us before we ever existed and chose to make us His own children through the redeeming work of Christ, which had not yet even been accomplished. That is grace, pure unadulterated unmerited favor.

Here is how Paul says it in II Timothy 1:9: “[God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (ESV).

Our salvation rests on the solid foundation of God’s work and not on the shaky foundation of our work. All our blessings are unshakable and invincible because of the electing love of God.

That He adopts us just reinforces this emphasis on unmerited grace. Adoption means we have our position by grace and not by right, yet we have the same privileges.

Imagine a little adopted boy asking his daddy why he adopted him. Was it because he was smarter than all the other babies or prettier, or something in him that made him stand out? His daddy tells him no, it was because they chose him and loved him. And no matter what he did, he was theirs and they loved him. He couldn’t be unadopted.

To what do we owe our adoption? Who our parents are, our race, wealth, good fortune, our own will? No, it’s according to His good pleasure.

If you believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ then “the roots of your life are planted in the eternal counsels of God and the branches of your life are growing into an absolutely sure and glorious future with God” (Piper, sermon *God’s Invincible Purpose, II*, 3/8/92).

This being true, you don’t have to live another day wondering if your life matters or if there is any significance to who you are or what you do. There are awesome purposes at work in your life. You have been and are being blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And you are being prepared for eternal blessings in the coming ages.

Reprobation.

I think we can wrap our heads around why God chooses us. We can grasp that we are sinners and that if He doesn’t save us we won’t be saved. The more difficult part of the doctrine is why then doesn’t God choose everyone?

Belgic Confession, Article 16 says: “He is just, in leaving others in their ruin and fall into which they have plunged themselves.”

The doctrine of reprobation or of passing over some is grounded in the justice of God.

God is God and as God He is not obligated to save anyone or everyone. He reserves the right to have mercy on whom He will have mercy. Some receive mercy and some receive justice. No one receives injustice.

God manifests His great mercy in our election. God manifests His great justice in His passing over some to reprobation.

“Reprobation is the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby to manifest His justice” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 685).

Some try to use reprobation as an excuse to sin. But reprobation is not the cause of sin. Man’s sinning is the cause of his reprobation.

God chooses to do nothing. He leaves them in their sin, leaves them to keep on doing what they most want to do. God will judge them by what they have done, they will be without excuse.

Difference between election and reprobation:

The cause of election is God.

The cause of reprobation is the sinner.

The ground of election is grace.

The ground of reprobation is justice.

The elect are without merit.

The reprobate are without excuse.

The purpose of election is the glory of God’s grace and mercy.

The purpose of reprobation is the glory of God’s justice and righteousness.

Hell is where God says to man, “Thy will be done.”

Heaven is where man says to God, “Thy will be done.”

Salvation brings God joy and delight, and is cause for rejoicing.

Reprobation brings God sorrow (I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Ezekiel 33:11).

Application and conclusion.

The fruit of this doctrine in our life should be three things. It should fill us with bedrock solid confidence in God; it should fill us with humility in His mercy and grace; and it should fill our hearts with wonder, worship and praise.

We have assurance that what God has begun He will finish. This doctrine gives us assurance as we look to the future and as we face doubts and anxieties. Our election is eternal, it's more fixed than the stars in heaven. Our salvation doesn't rest on us or our ability or our decision or choice of God. Our salvation rests on the bedrock of God's choice.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.

The main purpose behind this doctrine is to glorify God's grace and mercy and love. The main response we should have to this doctrine is to love God and worship God.

I am a Christian because far back before the foundations of the earth were laid, before any creation at all, God decided He would love me. Why? Not because of anything to do with me at all. Why? Simply because He decided to love me.

That is humbling, that is cause for worship, that is cause for obedience. That is cause to love Him with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

All our spiritual blessings and our eternity in glory are because before the foundations of the earth were laid, God in His wonderful sovereign grace choose us in Christ to be His adopted sons and daughters.

All of eternity will be a glorious display of "the immeasurable riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Our closing hymn is a wonderful old expression of this great truth:

'Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
But Thou hast chosen me;
Thou from the sin that stained me,
Hast cleansed and set me free,
Of old Thou hast ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

Prayer:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God by whom every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is secure in Him. Praise God from whom we have every confidence in His faithful unchanging love. Praise God who from before the foundations of the earth chose us for salvation and to be His children by adoption and to be holy and blameless in His sight and to receive a share in the inheritance that is ours in heaven. Praise God who has written our name in the Lambs Book of Life. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.