

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 255

ELECTION & REPROBATION

*Therefore hath he mercy on
whom he will have mercy,
and whom he will he
hardeneth.*

Romans 9:18

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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255

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ELECTION, THE DECREE OF GOD

Robert Purnell (1606-1666)

ELECTION is the decree of God, of His free love, grace, and mercy, choosing some men to faith, holiness, and eternal life for the praise of His glorious mercy (1Th 1:4; 2Th 2:13; Eph 1:4-6; Rom 8:29-30). The causes of election were none other but His mere good will and pleasure (Luk 12:32; Rom 11:5; 9:11, 16; Eph 1:5; 2Ti 1:9).

The end of election is the manifestation of the riches of His grace and mercy (Rom 9:23; Eph 1:6).

Question: Were not Christ, faith, and holiness the causes of election?

Answer: No, the sending of Christ, faith, holiness, and eternal life are only the effects of God's love by which He manifesteth the infinite riches of His grace (Joh 3:16; 1Jo 4:10; Act 13:4; Ti 1:1; Col 1:12; Rom 6:23).

God—merely out of His good pleasure, without the foresight of any good in the creature, according to His unlimited sovereignty—elected a certain number by name unto eternal salvation, and He hath decreed to effect all the ways and means for them and in them to bring them there to (2Ti 1:9; 1Pe 2:8). So, some are elected unto life out of all sorts of people (Mat 20:16; Rom 9:24; Rev 7:9).

That unto which God hath elected them is (1) the adoption of sons; (2) sanctification of life here; and (3) eternal life hereafter.

The first and only moving cause of election is the good pleasure and love of God (Eph 1:5; Rom 9:18; Eph 1:11), so that faith is not the cause but the effect of election (Act 13:48).

God is no respecter of persons, and yet He elected some and left others when He found no difference.

A man may come to know in time that he was elected before time. We come to apprehend this (1) by faith (1Th 1:4); (2) by our effectual calling; (3) by our justification (Rom 8:30); (4) by our sanctification (Rom 8:30); (5) by the testimony of God's Spirit (Rom 8:9, 16-17; 1Co 2:10-12; 2Pe 1:2-3; 2Co 1:21, 23).

From *A Little Cabinet: Richly Stored with All Sorts of Heavenly Varieties and Soul-Reviving Influences* (London: Thomas Brewster, 1657), 6.

Robert Purnell (1606-1666): Particular Baptist pastor; possibly born in Bristol, England, UK.



A FOUNDATIONAL DOCTRINE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

ELECTION is a *foundational* doctrine. In the past, many of the ablest teachers were accustomed to commence their systematic theology with a presentation of the attributes of God, and then a contemplation of His eternal decrees;¹ and it is our studied conviction, after perusing the writings of many of our moderns, that the method followed by their predecessors cannot be improved upon. God existed before man, and His eternal purpose² long antedated³ His works in time. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Act 15:18). The divine councils went before creation. As a builder draws his plans before he begins to build, so the great Architect predestinated everything before a single creature was called into existence. Nor has God kept this a secret locked in His own bosom: it has pleased Him to make known in His Word the everlasting counsels of His grace, His design in the same, and the grand end He has in view.

When a building is in course of construction, onlookers are often at a loss to perceive the reason for many of the details. As yet, they discern no order or design; everything appears to be in confusion. But if they could carefully scan the builder’s “plan” and visualize the finished production, much that had puzzled would become clear to them. It is the same with the outworking of God’s eternal purpose. Unless we are acquainted with His eternal decrees, history remains an insoluble enigma.⁴ God is not working at random: the gospel has been sent forth on no uncertain mission. The final outcome in the conflict between good and evil has not been left indeterminate;⁵ how many are to be saved or lost depends not on the will of the creature. Everything was infallibly determined and immutably fixed by God from the beginning, and all that happens in time is but the accomplishment of what was ordained in eternity.

The grand truth of election, then, takes us back to the beginning of all things. It antedated the entrance of sin into the universe, the Fall of man, the advent of Christ, and the proclamation of the gospel. A right

¹ See FGB 237, *God’s Decrees*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² See FGB 236, *God’s Eternal Purpose*.

³ **antedated** – came before in time.

⁴ **insoluble enigma** – mystery that cannot be solved.

⁵ **indeterminate** – unknown; uncertain.

understanding of it, especially in its relation to the everlasting covenant, is essential if we are to be preserved from fundamental error. If the foundation itself be faulty, then the building erected on it cannot be sound; and if we err in our conceptions of this basic truth, then just in proportion as we do so will our grasp of all other truth be inaccurate. God's dealings with Jew and Gentile, His object in sending His Son into this world, His design by the gospel, yes, the whole of His providential dealings, cannot be seen in their proper perspective until they are viewed in the light of His eternal election. This will become the more evident as we proceed.

It is a *difficult* doctrine and this in three respects. *First*, in the *understanding* of it. Unless we are privileged to sit under the ministry of some Spirit-taught servant of God who presents the truth to us systematically, great pains and diligence are called for in the searching of the Scriptures, so that we may collect and tabulate⁶ their scattered statements on this subject. It has not pleased the Holy Spirit to give us one complete and orderly setting forth of the doctrine of election, but instead “here a little, there a little” (Isa 28:10)—in typical history, in psalm and prophecy, in the great prayer of Christ (Joh 17), in the epistles of the apostles. *Second*, in the *acceptation* of it. This presents a much greater difficulty, for when the mind perceives what the Scriptures reveal thereon, the heart is loath to receive such a humbling and flesh-withering truth. How earnestly we need to pray for God to subdue our enmity against Him and our prejudice against His truth. *Third*, in the *proclamation* of it. No novice is competent to present this subject in its scriptural perspective and proportions.

Notwithstanding, these difficulties should not discourage, still less deter⁷ us, from an honest and serious effort to understand and heartily receive all that God has been pleased to reveal thereon. Difficulties are designed to humble us, to exercise us, to make us feel our need of wisdom from on high. It is not easy to arrive at a clear and adequate grasp of any of the great doctrines of Holy Writ, and God never intended it should be so. Truth must be “bought” (Pro 23:23); alas that so few are willing to pay the price, [which devotes] to the prayerful study of the Word the time wasted on newspapers or idle recreations. These difficulties are not insurmountable, for the Spirit has been given to God's people to guide them into all truth. Equally so for the minister of the Word: a humble waiting upon God, coupled with a diligent effort to be

⁶ **tabulate** – arrange.

⁷ **deter** – prevent.

a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, will in due time fit him to expound this truth to the glory of God and the blessing of his hearers.

It is an *important* doctrine, as is evident from various considerations. Perhaps we can express most impressively the momentousness of this truth by pointing out that apart from eternal election there had never been any Jesus Christ, and therefore, no divine gospel; for if God had never chosen a people unto salvation, He never would have sent His Son; and if He had sent no Savior, none would have ever been saved. Thus, the gospel itself originated in this vital matter of election. “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2Th 2:13). And *why* are we “bound to give thanks”? Because election is the root of all blessings, the spring of every mercy that the soul receives. If election be taken away, everything is taken away, for those who have any spiritual blessing are they who have *all* spiritual blessings “according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:3-4).

It was well said by Calvin: “We shall never be clearly convinced as we ought to be that our salvation flows from the fountain of God’s free mercy, till we are acquainted with His eternal election, which illustrates the grace of God by this comparison—that He adopts not all promiscuously to the hope of salvation but gives to some what He refuses to others. Ignorance of this principle evidently detracts from the divine glory and diminishes real humility...If we need to be recalled to the origin of election to prove that we obtain salvation from no other source than the mere goodness of God, they who desire to extinguish this principle do all they can to obscure what ought to be magnificently and loudly celebrated.”⁸

It is a *blessed* doctrine, for election is the spring of all blessings. This is made unmistakably clear by Ephesians 1:3-4. First, the Holy Spirit declares that the saints have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. Then He proceeds to show *why* and *how* they were so blessed: it is *according* as God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Election in Christ, therefore, precedes being blessed with all spiritual blessings, for we are blessed with them only as being in Him, and we are only in Him as chosen in Him. We see, then, what a grand and glorious truth this is, for all our hopes and prospects belong to it. Election, though distinct and personal, is not, as

⁸ John Calvin and John Allen, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2 (New Haven; Philadelphia: Hezekiah Howe; Philip H. Nicklin, 1816), 415.

is sometimes carelessly stated, a mere abstract choice of persons unto eternal salvation, irrespective of union⁹ with their Covenant-Head. It is a choice of them *in Christ*. It therefore implies every other blessing and all other blessings are given only through it and in accordance with it.

Rightly understood, there is nothing so calculated to impart comfort and courage, strength and security, as a heart-apprehension of this truth. To be assured that I am one of the high favorites of heaven imparts the confidence that God most certainly will supply my every need and make all things work together for my good (Rom 8:28). The knowledge that God has predestinated me unto eternal glory supplies an absolute guarantee that no efforts of Satan can possibly bring about my destruction, for if the great God be *for* me, who can be against me! It brings great peace to the preacher, for he now discovers that God has not sent him forth to draw a bow at a venture, but that His Word shall accomplish that which He pleases and shall prosper whereto He sends it (Isa 55:11). And what encouragement it should afford the awakened sinner. As he learns that election is solely a matter of divine grace, hope is kindled in his heart. As he discovers that election singled out some of the vilest of the vile to be the monuments of divine mercy, why should he despair?

It is a *distasteful* doctrine. One had naturally thought that a truth so God-honoring, Christ-exalting, and so blessed, had been cordially espoused by all professing Christians who had had it clearly presented to them. Since the terms *predestinated*, *elect*, and *chosen* occur so frequently in the Word, one would surely conclude that all who claim to accept the Scriptures as divinely inspired would receive with implicit faith¹⁰ this grand truth, referring the act itself—as becometh sinful and ignorant creatures so to do—unto the sovereign good pleasure of God. But such is far, very far from being the actual case. No doctrine is so detested by proud human nature as this one, which makes nothing of the creature and everything of the Creator; yes, at no other point is the enmity of the carnal mind so blatantly and hotly evident...

While the truth of eternal punishment is the one most objectionable to non-professors, that of God's sovereign election is the truth most loathed and reviled by the majority of those claiming to be believers. Let it be plainly announced that salvation originated not in the will of man, but in the will of God (*see* Joh 1:13; Rom 9:16), that were it not so none would or could be saved—for as the result of the fall, man has lost

⁹ See FGB 214, *Union with Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁰ **implicit faith** – faith that rests on the unquestioned, absolute authority of another.

all desire and will unto that which is good (Joh 5:40; Rom 3:11)—and that even the elect themselves have to be made willing (Psa 110:3). Loud will be the cries of indignation raised against such teaching.

It is at *this* point the issue is drawn. Merit-mongers will not allow the supremacy of the divine will and the impotency unto good of the human will; so they who are the most bitter in denouncing election by the sovereign pleasure of God are the warmest in crying up the freewill of fallen man...But whatever aversion men may now have to this blessed truth, they will be compelled to hear it in the last day, hear it as the voice of final, unalterable, and eternal decision. When death and Hades, the sea and dry land, shall give up the dead, then shall the Book of Life—the register in which was recorded from before the foundation of the world the whole election of grace—be opened in the presence of angels and demons, in the presence of the saved and of the lost, and that voice shall sound to the highest arches of heaven, to the lowest depths of hell, to the uttermost bound of the universe: “And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). Thus, the truth that is hated by the non-elect above all others is the one that shall ring in the ears of the lost as they enter their eternal doom! Ah, my reader, the reason people do not receive and duly prize the truth of election is because they do not feel their due need of it.

It is a *separating doctrine*. The preaching of the sovereignty of God, as exercised by Him in foreordaining the eternal destiny of each of His creatures, serves as an effectual flail to divide the chaff from the wheat. “He that is of God heareth God’s words” (Joh 8:47)—no matter how contrary they may be to his ideas. It is one of the marks of the regenerate that they set to their seal that God is true. Nor do they pick and choose, as will religious hypocrites: once they perceive a truth is clearly taught in the Word, even though it be utterly opposed to their own reason and inclinations, they humbly bow to it and implicitly receive it, and would do so though not another person in [the] whole world believed it. But it is far otherwise with the unregenerate. As the apostle declares, “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1Jo 4:5-6).

We know of nothing so divisive between the sheep and the goats as a faithful exposition of this doctrine. If a servant of God accepts some new charge, and he wishes to ascertain which of his people desire the pure milk of the Word and which prefer the devil’s substitutes, let him deliver a series of sermons on this subject, and it will quickly be the

means of “taking forth the precious from the vile” (Jer 15:19). It was thus in the experience of the divine Preacher: when Christ announced, “No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father,” we are told, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (Joh 6:65-66)...

It is a *neglected* doctrine. Though occupying so prominent a place in the Word of God, it is today but little preached and still less understood. Of course, it is not to be expected that the “higher critics” and their blinded dupes¹¹ should preach that which makes nothing of man; but even among those who wish to be looked up to as “orthodox” and “evangelical,” there are scarcely any who give this grand truth a real place in either their pulpit ministrations or their writings. In some cases, this is due to ignorance: not having been taught it in the seminary, and certainly not in the “Bible Institutes,” they have never perceived its great importance and value. But in too many cases, it is a desire to be popular with their hearers that muzzles their mouths. Nevertheless, neither ignorance, prejudice, nor enmity can do away with the doctrine itself or lessen its vital momentousness.

In closing these introductory remarks, let it be pointed out that this blessed doctrine needs to be handled *reverently*. It is not a subject to be reasoned about and speculated upon but approached in a spirit of holy awe and devotion. It is to be handled *soberly*: “When thou art in disputation, engaged upon a just quarrel to vindicate the truth of God from heresy and distortion, look into thy heart, set a watch on thy lips, beware of wildfire in thy zeal.”¹² Nevertheless, this truth is to be dealt with uncompromisingly and plainly, irrespective of the fear or favor of man, confidently leaving all “results” in the hand of God. May it be graciously granted us to write in a manner pleasing to God, and you to receive whatever is from Himself.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, January 1938, “Doctrine of Election: Introduction”; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



He that believeth is elected; whoever casts himself on Christ as a guilty sinner is certainly God’s chosen child.—*Charles Spurgeon*

¹¹ **dupes** – persons who are tricked or swindled.

¹² Edward Reynolds (1599-1676), *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds*, Vol. 1 (London: B. Holdsworth, St. Paul’s Church Yard, 1826), 153.

THE DOCTRINE STATED

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.—1 Thessalonians 1:4

I have firstly to state the doctrine of election. What is it? What does it mean? Accurate statements on this point are of great importance. No doctrine of Scripture, perhaps, has suffered so much damage from the erroneous conceptions of foes and the incorrect descriptions of friends as that which is now before us.

The true doctrine of election I believe to be as follows: God has been pleased from all eternity to choose certain men and women out of mankind whom, by His counsel secret to us, He has decreed to save by Jesus Christ. None are finally saved except those who are thus chosen. Hence, the Scripture gives to God's people in several places the names of "God's elect," and the choice or appointment of them to eternal life is called "God's election."

Those men and women, whom God has been pleased to choose from all eternity, He calls in time by His Spirit working in due season. He convinces them of sin. He leads them to Christ. He works in them repentance and faith. He converts, renews, and sanctifies them. He keeps them by His grace from falling away entirely and finally brings them safe to glory. In short, God's eternal election is the first link in that chain of a sinner's salvation of which heavenly glory is the end. None ever repent, believe, and are born again, except the elect. God's election is the primary and original cause of a saint's being what he is.

The doctrine here stated, no doubt, is peculiarly deep, mysterious, and hard to understand. We have no eyes to see it fully. We have no line to fathom it thoroughly. No part of the Christian religion has been so much disputed, rejected, and reviled as this. None has called forth so much of that enmity against God which is the grand mark of the carnal mind. Thousands of so-called Christians profess to believe the atonement, salvation by grace, and justification by faith, and yet refuse to look at the doctrine of election. The very mention of the word to some persons is enough to call forth expressions of anger, ill-temper, and passion.

But, after all, is the doctrine of election plainly stated in Scripture? This is the whole question that an honest Christian has to do with. If it

is not in the Book of God, let it be forever discarded, refused, and rejected by man, no matter who propounds¹ it. If it is there, let us receive it with reverence as a part of divine revelation and humbly believe, even where we are not able to understand completely or explain fully. What then is written in the Scriptures? “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). Is election in the Bible, or is it not? Does the Bible speak of certain persons as God’s elect or not?

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: “For the elect’s sake the days shall be shortened” (Mat 24:22). “If it were possible they should deceive even the elect” (Mar 13:22). “He shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect” (Mat 24:31). “Shall not God avenge his own elect?” (Luk 18:7).

Hear what St. Paul says: “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33). “God hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13).

Hear what St. Peter says: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1Pe 1:2). “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10).

I place these eleven texts before my readers, and I ask them to consider them well. If words have any meaning at all, they appear to me to teach most plainly the doctrine of personal election. In the face of such texts, I dare not refuse to believe that it is a scriptural doctrine. I dare not, as an honest man, shut my eyes against the plain, obvious sense of Bible language. If I once began to do so, I should have no ground to stand on in pressing the gospel on an unconverted man. I could not expect him to believe one set of texts to be true, if I did not believe another set. The eleven texts above quoted seem to my mind to prove conclusively that personal election is a doctrine of Scripture. As such I

¹ **propounds** – puts forward an idea for consideration by others.

must receive it, and I must believe it, however difficult it may be. As such, I ask my readers this day to look at it calmly, weigh it seriously, and receive it as God's truth.

After all, whatever men may please to say, there is no denying that the election of some men and women to salvation is a simple matter of fact. That all professing Christians are not finally saved, but only some; that those who are saved owe their salvation entirely to the free grace of God and the calling of His Spirit; that no man can at all explain why some are called unto salvation and others are not called—all these are things that no Christian who looks around him can pretend for a moment to deny. Yet what does all this come to but the doctrine of election?

Right views of human nature are certain to lead us to the same conclusion. Once admit that we are all naturally dead in trespasses and sins and have no power to turn to God; once admit that all spiritual life in the heart of man must begin with God; once admit that He Who created the world by saying, "Let there be light," must shine into man's heart and create light within him; once admit that God does not enlighten all professing Christians in this manner but only some and that He acts in this matter entirely as a sovereign, giving no account of His matters—once admit all this, and then see where you are. Whether you know it or not, you admit the whole doctrine of election!

Right views of God's nature and character, as revealed in the Bible, appear to me to bring us to the same position. Do we believe that God knows all things from all eternity, that He governs all things by His providence, and that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground without Him? Do we believe that He works all His works by a plan, like an architect of perfect knowledge, and that nothing concerning His saints, as His choicest and most excellent work, is left to chance, accident, and luck? Well, if we believe all this, we believe the whole doctrine that this paper is meant to support. This is the doctrine of election.

From Old Paths: Being Plain Statements of Some of the Weightier Matters of Christianity (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1898), 461-464; in the public domain.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England, UK.



As there is nothing but the pure glory of God that can make a man perfectly and fully happy, so there is nothing but the pure wrath of God that can make a man fully and perfectly miserable.

—Thomas Brooks

WHERE ELECTION BEGINS

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

ACCURATELY speaking, election is a branch of predestination, the latter being a more comprehensive term than the former. Predestination relates to all creatures, things, and events, but election is restricted to rational beings—angels and humans. As the word *predestinate* signifies, God from all eternity sovereignly ordained and immutably determined the history and destiny of each and all His creatures. But in this study, we shall confine ourselves to predestination as it relates to or concerns rational creatures. And here too a further distinction must be noticed. There cannot be an *election* without a *rejection*, a taking without a passing by, a choice without a refusal. As Psalm 78 expresses it, “He *refused* the tabernacle of Joseph, and *chose not* the tribe of Ephraim; but *chose* the tribe of Judah” (vv. 67-68). Thus, predestination includes both reprobation (the preterition or passing by of the non-elect and the foreordaining of them to condemnation—Jude 4—because of their sins) and election unto eternal life, the former of which we shall not now discuss.

The doctrine of election means, then, that God singled out certain ones in His mind both from among angels (1Ti 5:21) and from among men and ordained them unto eternal life and blessedness; that before He created them, He decided their destiny, just as a builder draws his plans and determines every part of the building before any of the materials are assembled for the carrying out of his design. Election may thus be defined: It is that part of the counsel of God whereby He did from all eternity purpose in Himself to display His grace upon certain of His creatures. This was made effectual by a definite decree concerning them. Now, in every decree of God, three things must be considered: (1) the beginning, (2) the matter or substance, (3) the end or design. Let us offer a few remarks upon each.

The beginning of the decree is *the will of God*. It originates solely in His own sovereign determination. While determining the estate of His creatures, God’s own will is the alone and absolute cause thereof. As there is nothing above God to rule Him, so there is nothing outside of Himself that can be in any wise an impulsive cause unto Him. To say otherwise is to make the will of God no will at all. Herein He is infinitely exalted above us, for not only are we subject to One above us, but our wills are being constantly moved and disposed by external causes.

The will of God could have no cause outside of itself, or otherwise there would be something prior to itself (for a cause ever precedes the effect) and something more excellent (for the cause is ever superior to the effect), and thus God would not be the independent Being that He is.

The matter or substance of a divine decree is God's purpose to manifest one or more of His attributes or perfections. This is true of all the divine decrees, but as there is variety in God's attributes, so there is in the things He decrees to bring into existence. The two principal attributes He exercises upon His rational creatures are His grace and His justice. In the case of the elect, God determined to exemplify the riches of His amazing grace; but in the case of the non-elect, He saw fit to demonstrate His justice and severity—withholding His grace from them because it was His good pleasure so to do. Yet it must not be allowed for a moment that this latter was a point of cruelty in God, for His nature is not grace alone nor justice alone but both together; and therefore, in determining to display both, there could not be a point of injustice.

The end or design of every divine decree is God's own glory. For nothing less than this could be worthy of Himself. As God swears by Himself because He can swear by none greater, so because a greater and grander end cannot be proposed than His own glory, God has set up that as the supreme end of all His decrees and works. "The Lord hath made all things for himself" (Pro 16:4)—for His own glory. As all things are *from* Him as the first cause, so all things are *to* Him (Rom 11:36) as the final end. The good of His creatures is but the secondary end, His own glory is the supreme end, and everything else is subordinate thereto. In the case of the elect, it is God's amazing grace that will be magnified; in the case of the reprobate, His pure justice will be glorified...

The source of election, then, is the will of God. It should be scarcely necessary to point out that by "God" we mean Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though there are three persons in the Godhead, there is but one undivided nature common to Them all, and so but one will. They are one, and They agree in one: "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" (Job 23:13). Let it also be pointed out that the will of God is not a thing apart from God, nor is it to be considered only as a part of God. The will of God is God Himself willing: it is, if we may so speak, His very nature in activity, for His will is His very essence. Nor is God's will subject to any fluctuation or change: when we affirm that God's will is immutable, we are only saying that God Himself is "without variableness or shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17). Therefore, the will of God

is *eternal*; for since God Himself had no beginning, and since His will is His very nature, then His will must be from everlasting.

To proceed one step further: The will of God is absolutely free, uninfluenced, and uncontrolled by anything outside of itself. This appears from the making of the world—as well as of everything in it. The world is not eternal but was *made* by God; yet whether it should be or should not be created was determined by Himself alone. The time when it was made—whether sooner or later; the size of it—whether smaller or larger; the duration of it—whether for a season or forever; the condition of it—whether it should remain “very good” or be defiled by sin was all settled by the sovereign decree of the Most High. Had He so pleased, God could have brought this world into existence millions of ages earlier than He did. Had He so pleased, He could have made it and all things in it in a moment of time instead of in six days and nights. Had He so pleased, He could have limited the human family to a few thousands or hundreds or have made it a thousand times larger than it is. No other reason can be assigned why God created it when and as it is than His own imperial will.

God’s will was absolutely free in connection with election. In choosing a people unto eternal life and glory, there was nothing outside Himself that moved God to form such a purpose. As He expressly declares, “I *will* have mercy on whom I *will* have mercy, and I *will* have compassion on whom I *will* have compassion” (Rom 9:15)—language could not state more definitely the absoluteness of divine sovereignty in this matter. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption¹ of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5); here again all is resolved into the mere pleasure of God. He bestows His favors or withholds them as pleaseth Himself. Nor does He stand in any need of our vindicating His procedure. The Almighty is not to be brought down to the bar of human reason; instead of seeking to justify God’s high sovereignty, we are only required to believe it on the authority of His own Word. “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:25-26)—the Lord Jesus was content to rest there, and so must we be...

There is an order in the divine counsels, as there is in God’s works of creation...An object must exist or subsist before it can be loved. Election was the first act in the mind of God, whereby He chose the

¹ See FGB 246, *Adoption*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

persons of the elect to be holy and without blame (v. 4). Predestination was God's second act, whereby He ratified by decree the *state* of those to whom His election had given a real subsistence² before Him. Having chosen them in His dear Son unto a perfection of holiness and righteousness, God's love went forth to them and bestowed upon them the chiefest and highest blessing His love could confer: to make them His children by adoption. God is love, and all His love is exercised upon Christ and those in Him. Having made the elect His own by the sovereign choice of His will, God's heart was set upon them as His special treasure...

The order we are here insisting upon is clearly expressed in Ephesians 1. First, "He [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world: that we should be holy and without blame [righteous] before him in love" (v. 4). That was the *initial* act in the divine mind. Second, "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself," and that "according to the good pleasure of his will" (v. 5). That was God *enriching* those upon whom He had set His heart. Third, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (v. 6). That was both the subject and *design* of God's decree—the manifestation and magnification of His grace...

The election of the church, as of all His acts and works, is to be traced right back to the uncontrolled and uncontrollable will of God. Nowhere else in Scripture is the *order* of the divine counsels so definitely revealed as in Ephesians 1, and nowhere else is emphasis placed so strongly upon God's will. He predestinated unto the adoption of children "according to the good pleasure of his *will*" (v. 5). He has made known to us "the mystery of his *will*"...and that "according to his good pleasure which he hath *purposed* in himself" (v. 9). And then, as though that was not sufficiently explicit, the passage closes with "being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh *all* things after the counsel of his own *will*, that we should be to the praise of his glory" (vv. 11-12).

Let us dwell for a moment longer upon that remarkable expression "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (v. 11). Note well: it is not "the counsel of his *own heart*," nor even "the counsel of his own mind," but *will*: not "the will of his own counsel," but "the counsel of his own will." Herein God differs radically from us. Our wills are influenced by the thoughts of our minds and moved by the

² **subsistence** – state of existence.

affections of our hearts, but not so God's. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan 4:35). God's will is supreme, determining the exercise of all His perfections. He is infinite in wisdom, yet His will regulates the operations of it. He is full of mercy, but His will determines when and to whom He shows it. He is inflexibly just, yet His will decides whether justice shall be put forth: observe carefully, not "that *can* by no means clear the guilty" (as is so generally misquoted), but "that *will* by no means clear the guilty" (Exo 34:7). God first wills or determines that a thing shall be, and then His wisdom contrives the execution of it.

Let us now point out what has been disproved. From all that has been said above it is clear, first, that our *good works* are not the thing that induced God to elect us, for that act passed in the divine mind in eternity—long before we had any actual existence. See how this very point is set aside in [the following]: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth" (Rom 9:11). Again, we read, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). Since we were elected prior to our creation, good works could not be the moving cause of it; no, they are the fruits and effects of it.

Second, the *holiness* of men, whether in principle or in practice or both, is not the moving cause of election; for as Ephesians 1:4 so plainly declares, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him"—not because we *were* holy, but so that we *might* be...

Third, nor is *faith* the cause of our election. How could it be? Throughout their unregeneracy³ all men are in a state of unbelief, living in this world without God and without hope. And when we had faith, it was not of ourselves—either of our goodness, power, or will. No, it was a gift from God (Eph 2:9), and the operation of the Spirit (Col 2:12), flowing from His grace. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Act 13:48), and *not* "as many as believed, were ordained to eternal life." Since then, faith flows from divine grace, it cannot be the cause of our election.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, February 1938, "The Doctrine of Election: Its Source"; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



³ **unregeneracy** – state of not being born of God's Spirit.

THE DECREES OF GOD

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711)

WE shall now proceed with a discussion of the specific decrees of God, speaking particularly of those relating to man's salvation and damnation. Due to repeated slander by individuals with evil motives, the word *predestination* gives some offense, triggers prejudice, and is repulsive to people who are both ignorant and filled with resentment against this doctrine. This has led some to be of the opinion that it is preferable not to speak of this mystery. Since Scripture, however, bears such abundant testimony to this doctrine; since it is a matter of supreme importance, yielding a proper understanding of the entire way of salvation; and since it is a fountain of comfort and genuine sanctification, nothing must be held back. The entire counsel of God must be declared. Everyone must strive to understand this doctrine well and apply it properly.

Scripture refers to election in a variety of ways.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is called *the Elect* (Isa 42:1), "Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1Pe 1:20), to be the Surety and Savior of the elect.

2. *The holy angels have been elected to an eternal and permanent state of felicity.* They are not chosen in Christ, and He is not considered to be their Mediator, as there was neither sin in them nor would there be. He is also not considered their Head to preserve and confirm them in their state, as Scripture makes no mention of this at all. The Lord Jesus has been given unto the salvation of men and not angels. As God and man, however, Christ is exalted above the angels who worship Him, and whom He, as Lord, uses according to His will to the benefit of His elect. These holy angels have been chosen by God, which explains why they are called "elect" (1Ti 5:21), in distinction from other angels who have sinned, not having kept their first estate, and having left their own habitation, are therefore eternally damned (*cf.* 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6; Mat 25:41).

3. *Some people are elected to a specific office, possibly in government, as Saul was chosen to be king.* "See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen?" (1Sa 10:24). This was also true when he was rejected. "I have rejected him" (1Sa 16:1). Others are chosen to an ecclesiastical office, as Judas, who was also chosen to be an apostle. "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Joh 6:70).

4. This manner of election is not under discussion here, but rather the election of some men *unto salvation*, in contrast to those who have been rejected by God. Various words are used to give expression to the doctrine of election, such as,

(1) **Predestination**,¹ which in Latin is *predestinatio*. It signifies a determination of a matter before it exists or transpires to bring it to a certain end. “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel² determined before [that is, predestined] to be done” (Act 4:28). This is further confirmed in 1 Corinthians 2:7: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory.” It is this word that is used to refer to men’s destiny relative to salvation, as well as the means whereby they obtain this salvation. “We...being predestinated...having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” (Eph 1:11, 5); “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son...Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (Rom 8:29-30). This word not only relates to election, but also to reprobation, as confirmed in texts where the word is used in reference to Herod, Pilate, and Judas. “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Act 4:28). “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed” (Luk 22:22).

(2) **Another word is foreknowledge**.³ This word does not refer to a mere foreknowledge whereby God has prior knowledge of all things, including the end of men. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Act 15:18). It rather refers to a foreknowledge characterized by love and delight. In this manner, Christ is referred to as “the Elect of God,” stating that He “was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1Pe 1:20). In like manner, “the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous” (Psa 1:6), and “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2Ti 2:19). Believers are therefore called “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1Pe 1:2). It signifies election itself. “God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew” (Rom 11:2); “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate” (Rom 8:29). This foreknowledge is contrasted with not being known, that is, being rejected. “I never knew you” (Mat 7:23); “I know you not” (Mat 25:12).

¹ GK = Προορισμός (*Proörismos*)

² GK = προώρισε (*proörise*)

³ GK = Πρόγνωσις (*Prognosis*)

(3) **Scripture also uses *purpose*.**⁴ This word does not refer to an impotent wish, but to a certain, immutable, unbreakable decree. It is used regarding the election of the Lord Jesus as Surety:⁵ “Whom God hath sent forth to be a propitiation⁶” (Rom 3:25). It is also used relative to the elect, particularly regarding both the means by which, and the end unto which they are made partakers of salvation: “...them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28); “...that the purpose of God according to election might stand” (Rom 9:11); “...being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11).

(4) **Then there is the word *election*.**⁷ Even though it is used in reference to other matters, it also is frequently used to describe divine appointment unto salvation as well as the means whereby the elect become partakers of salvation. “The purpose of God according to election” (Rom 9:11); “There is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5); “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1Th 1:4). In this respect, believers are called the elect: “Few are chosen” (Mat 22:14); “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33). They are even referred to as “the election” itself: “But the election hath obtained it” (Rom 11:7). They whom God has chosen for a specific purpose He has also chosen regarding the means, which is also referred to as “choosing.” “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit. I have chosen you out of the world” (Joh 15:16, 19).

From *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 211.

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711): Dutch theologian and major representative of the Dutch Second Reformation; born in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands.



As sure as ever you believe on the Savior and go to Him, you were predestinated to do so from all eternity, and your faith is the great mark and evidence that you are chosen of God.—*Charles Spurgeon*

⁴ Greek = Πρόθεσις (*Prothesis*)

⁵ **Surety** – one who undertakes the debt of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary’s cross.

⁶ **propitiation** – “Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice [of Christ].” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)

⁷ GK = Ἐκλογή (*ekloge*)

THE HEAD OF ELECTION

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

THE decrees of God, His eternal purpose, the [incomprehensible] counsels of His will, are indeed a great deep. Yet this we know: from first to last, they have *a definite relation to Christ*, for He is the Alpha and the Omega in all covenant transactions. Beautifully did Spurgeon express it: “Search for the celestial fountain from which divine streams of grace have flowed to us, and you find Jesus Christ as the well-spring of covenant love. If your eyes shall ever see the covenant roll, if you shall ever be permitted in a future state to see the whole plan of redemption as it was mapped out in the chambers of eternity, you shall see the blood-red line of atoning sacrifice running along the margin of every page, and you shall see that from beginning to end one object was always aimed at—the glory of the Son of God.”¹ It therefore seems strange that many who see that election is the foundation of salvation yet overlook the glorious *Head of election*, in Whom the elect were chosen and from Whom they receive all blessings.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:3-4). Since we were chosen *in Christ*, it is evident that we were chosen *out of ourselves*; and since we were chosen *in Christ*, it necessarily follows that He was chosen before we were. This is clearly implied in the preceding verse, wherein the Father is expressly designated “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, according to the analogy of Scripture² (i.e., when He is said to be “the God” of anyone), God was “the God” of Christ first because He chose Him to that grace and union. Christ as man was predestinated as truly as we were, and so has God to be His *God* by predestination and free grace. Second, because the Father made a covenant with Him (Isa 42:6). In view of the covenant made with them, He became known as “the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob” (Exo 3:16); so, in view of the covenant He made with Christ, He became His *God*. Third, because God is the author of all Christ’s blessedness (Psa 45:2, 7).

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Alpha and Omega,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 9 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1863), 715.

² **analogy of Scripture** – method of biblical interpretation where clearer related Scriptures are used to interpret a particular passage (Rom 12:6).

“According as he [God] hath chosen us in him” means, then, that in election, Christ was made *the Head* of the elect. “In the womb of election, He, the Head, came out first [adumbrated³ in every normal birth, A. W. P.], and then we, the members.”⁴ In all things, Christ must have the “preeminence,”⁵ and therefore is He “the firstborn” in election (Rom 8:29). In the order of nature, Christ was chosen first; but in the order of time, we were elected with Him. We were not chosen for ourselves apart, but *in Christ*, which denotes three things. First, we were chosen in Christ as the members of His body. Second, we were chosen in Him as the pattern that we should be conformed unto. Third, we were chosen in Him as the final end, i.e., it was for Christ’s glory, to be His “fulness” (Eph 1:23).

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1). That this passage refers to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ is unmistakably plain from the Spirit’s citation of it in Matthew 12:15-21. Here, then, is the grand original of election: in its first and highest instance, election is spoken of and applied to the Lord Jesus! It was the will of the eternal Three to elect and predestinate the Second Person into creature-being and existence, so that as God-man, “the firstborn of every creature” (Col 1:15), He was the subject of the divine decrees and the immediate and principal object of the love of the co-essential Three. And as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son—considered as God-man—to have life in Himself (Joh 5:26), to be a fountain of life of grace and glory unto His beloved spouse, who received her being and wellbeing from Jehovah’s free grace and everlasting love.

When God determined to create among all the myriad⁶ creatures, both angelic and human that rose in the divine mind to be brought into being by Him, the man Christ Jesus was singled out of them and appointed to union with the Second Person in the blessed Trinity and was accordingly sanctified and set up. This original and highest act of election was one of pure sovereignty and amazing grace. The celestial hosts were passed by, and the seed of the woman was determined upon...What shall those say who so much dislike the truth that the heirs of heaven are elected, when they learn that Jesus Christ Himself is the subject of eternal election! ...

³ **adumbrated** – symbolized; foreshadowed.

⁴ Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679), *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861), 74.

⁵ **preeminence** – first place; highest rank.

⁶ **myriad** – countless.

Nowhere does the sovereignty of God shine forth so conspicuously as in His acts of election and reprobation, which took place in eternity past, and which nothing in the creature was the cause of. God's act of choosing His people in Christ was before the foundation of the world... [It] was wholly *of grace* and all to the praise and glory of it. In nothing else is Jehovah's sovereignty so manifest: indeed, the highest instance of it was in predestinating the Second Person in the Trinity to be the God-man. That this came under *the decree* of God is clear, again, from the words of the apostle: "Who verily [says he in speaking of Christ] was *foreordained* before the foundation of the world" (1Pe 1:20), and Who is said to be laid "in Sion a chief cornerstone, *elect*, precious" (1Pe 2:6). This grand original of election, so little known today, is of such transcendent importance that we dwell upon it a little longer, to point out some of the reasons why God was pleased to predestinate the man Christ Jesus unto personal union with His Son.

Christ was predestinated for higher ends than the saving of His people from the effects of their Fall in Adam. First, He was chosen for God Himself to delight in, far more so and infinitely above all other creatures. Being united to the Second Person, the man Christ Jesus was exalted to a closer union and communion with God. The Lord of hosts speaks of Him as "the man that is my fellow" (Zec 13:7), "mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa 42:1). Second, Christ was chosen that God might behold the image of Himself and all His perfections in a creature, so that His excellences are seen in Christ as in no other: "Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person" (Heb 1:3), which is spoken of the person of Christ as God-man. Third, by the union of the man Christ Jesus with the everlasting Son of God, the whole fulness of the Godhead was to dwell personally in Him, He being "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15, 19).

The man Christ Jesus, then, was chosen unto the highest union and communion with God Himself. In Him, the love and grace of Jehovah shine forth in their [unsurpassed] glory. The Son of God gave subsistence and personality to His human nature, so that the Son of God and His human nature are not merely one flesh as man and wife (which is the closest union with us), nor one spirit only (as is the case between Christ and the church: 1Co 6:17), but one person, and hence this creature nature is advanced to a fellowship in the society of the blessed Trinity, and therefore to Him God communicates Himself without measure (Joh 3:34)... If God will love, He must have an object for His love; and the object must have an existence before Him to exercise His love upon, for He cannot love a nonentity. It must therefore be that the

God-man and the elect in Him existed in the divine mind as objects of God's everlasting love before all time. In Christ, the church was chosen from everlasting: the one the Head, the other His body; the one being the Bridegroom, the other His bride; the one being chosen and appointed for the other. They were chosen together, yet Christ first in the order of the divine decrees. As, then, Christ and the church had existed in the will, thoughts, and purpose of the Father from the beginning, He could love them and rejoice in them...God, out of His eternal and infinite goodness of love and purposing Christ to become a creature and communicate with His creatures, ordained in His eternal counsel that person in the Godhead should be united to our nature and to one particular of His creatures, so that in the person of the Mediator the true ladder of salvation might be fixed, whereby God might descend to His creatures and His creatures ascend unto Him.

“Christ was first elected as Head and Mediator, and as the cornerstone to bear up the whole building; for the act of the Father's election in Christ supposeth Him first chosen to this mediatory work, and to be the head of the elect part of the world. After this election of Christ, others were predestinated to be conformed to this image of His: ‘Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren’ (Rom 8:29); i.e., to Christ as Mediator and taking human nature; not to Christ barely considered as God, for, as God, Christ is nowhere said to be the firstborn among many brethren. This conformity being specially intended in election, Christ was in the intention of the Father the first exemplar and copy of it. One foot of the compass of grace stood in Christ as the center, while the other walked about the circumference, pointing out one here and another there, to draw a line, as it were, between every one of those points and Christ. The Father, then, being the prime cause of the election of some out of the mass of mankind, was the prime cause of the election of Christ to bring them to the enjoyment of that to which they were elected. Is it likely that God, in founding an everlasting kingdom, should consult about the members before He did about the head? Christ was registered at the top of the book of election, and His members after Him. It is called, therefore, ‘the book of the Lamb.’”⁷

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, March 1938, “The Doctrine of Election: Its Grand Original,” available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



⁷ Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: Nichol; Nisbet and Co.; Robertson; Herbert, 1864-1866), 358.

ELECTION BIBLICALLY EXPLAINED

Joel Beeke & Paul Smalley

ACCORDING to the doctrine of election (Latin *electio*, “choice” or “selection”), God selected certain people for salvation by grace unto eternal glory. While we may gather the doctrine of election from many Scripture passages, we will take as our point of departure the “outburst of praise”¹ that opens Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:3-14, Paul pours out in one long sentence a catalog of spiritual blessings in Christ. The apostle particularly focuses upon election in verses 3-6:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

This passage teaches us several important aspects of the doctrine of election.

First, election is *an act of superlative divine love*. The Lord of election is the God Who so richly “hath blessed” His people that He is gladly “blessed” by them in return (Eph 1:3). He chose them “in love” (v. 4). The God of predestination is not stingy or cruel, but the “Father” Who aims at “the adoption of children” into His family (vv. 3, 5). In a word, election is “grace” (v. 6), which means it is the source of “all spiritual blessings” enumerated in this epistle (v. 3). This waterfall of love should stir us to overflow with praise. As Paul Baynes (c. 1573-1617) said, it is not enough to have a head knowledge of these benefits; people must work into their hearts “a sense and feeling of the worth of the benefits which they enjoy; for not having benefits, but esteeming and knowing the worth of them, maketh thankful.”²

God revealed that His election was a free act of love when He chose Israel. Moses explained that the Lord did not “set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people...but

¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Vol. 42, WBC (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 10.

² Paul Bayne[s], *An Entire Commentary upon the Whole Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: Nichol; Nisbet and Co.; Herbert, 1866), 16.

because the Lord loved you” (Deu 7:7-8). He loved them because He loved them. Neither was the Israelites’ redemption in any way merited by their righteousness, for they were a sinful people (Deu 9:4-8). In a similar fashion, God chose the people He would redeem and adopt as His children simply by the free choice of His love. God loves all human beings as His creatures (Psa 145:8-9; Luk 6:35), but He has freely set His love in a special way upon those whom He has “chosen,” so that they are His “beloved” (Col 3:12; 2Th 2:13).

Second, election involves a covenant between the Father and the Son.

The divine person electing His people is specified as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3). Paul also names Him as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 17). This is a covenantal title, similar to “the God of Abraham,”³ in which God gives Himself a name that calls to mind His promises to be a God to Abraham and his seed (Gen 17:7-8). When Paul writes that God “has blessed us,” the word translated as “bless” (*eulogō*) echoes the promise of God’s blessing to Abraham.⁴ Just as God’s election of the nation of Israel was bound up in a historical covenant with Abraham, so God’s election unto salvation is bound up in a covenant between God the Father and God the Son as His appointed Mediator concerning “eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Ti 1:2). The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 31) says, “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed.”

Therefore, our election is bound up with, though not identical to, God’s election of His Son to be the Mediator. God announced the Messiah to be “my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa 42:1). The Jews recognized that “Christ” is “the chosen of God” (Luk 23:35). He is the Lamb of God, Who was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1Pe 1:20). Though rejected by men, He is “chosen of God, and precious” (2:4). He was elected to be our Savior; we were elected to be the people He saves. The names of the elect are “written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

Election engages the triune God as the covenant God of His people. All three divine persons relate to the elect in saving love according to their one electing will. The Father is the primary person Who elected people unto salvation in Christ by the Spirit (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:3-14).

³ Gen 26:24; 28:13; 31:42, 53; Exo 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; 1Ki 18:36; 1Ch 29:18; 2Ch 30:6; Psa 47:9; Mat 22:32; Mar 12:26; Luk 20:37; Act 3:13; 7:32.

⁴ Gen 12:2-3; 14:19; 17:16; 22:17; 24:1, 35, 60 LXX.

Yet the Son also elected as a voluntary divine party of the eternal covenant. The Son's act of electing is not a prominent theme in the Scriptures, but Christ did say, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," a choice that makes them fruitful disciples separated from the world (Joh 15:16, 19). Thus, Christ is the electing God and the premier Elect One of the Father, through Whom God executes His decree of election to save all His chosen ones. William Perkins explained that election is *of Christ*, "as He is God," and *in Christ*, "as He is our Mediator."⁵ The Word does not explicitly say that the Holy Spirit elected us, but it does teach that He distributes His gifts to each person as He wills (1Co 12:11). Consequently, the God of predestination is not an alien, unknown entity, but the triune God Whom we personally grasp and hold by faith in His promises in the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we know the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then we know the God of election. We need not shrink back in slavish fear from predestination, for it is the will of our triune Savior.

Third, election results in union with Christ and His mediatorial benefits. Paul repeatedly says that election and the grace that flows from it are "in Christ" (Eph 1:3; cf. vv. 4, 6) and "by Jesus Christ" (v. 5). Just as cities store their water in massive towers rising into the sky, so God has stored all His blessings for His people in His Son, Who is exalted into the "heavenly places" (vv. 3, 20). Richard Sibbes said that it is a fundamental of our faith "that whatsoever is in us that are members, it is in our Head first; for God is first, and then Christ Mediator, and then we."⁶ Sibbes added, "Whatsoever Christ hath, or is, or hath done or suffered, it is mine by reason of this union with Him by faith, which is the grace of union that knits us to Christ, and the first grace of application."⁷ Prior to the accomplishment and application of our redemption was God's choice of us "in Him," that is, in Christ (Eph 1:4), so that Christ became our "representative head" in the plan of God. Hodge wrote that election forms "a federal union with Christ which is antecedent to all actual union, and is the source of it," so that we "receive in time the gift of the Holy Spirit and all other benefits of redemption."⁸

The Lord Jesus taught us that the Father has "given" Him certain

⁵ William Perkins, ed. Ryan Hurd, Joel R. Beeke, and Derek W. H. Thomas, *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 334.

⁶ Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, Vol. 5 (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: Nichol; Nisbet and Co.; Robertson, 1863), 217.

⁷ Sibbes, 242.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Ephesians*, electronic ed. (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation, 1996), 31.

people who will most certainly come to Him by faith, and He will save them, preserve them, and raise them to eternal life (Joh 6:37-39). Those whom the Father gave to Christ are His sheep for whom He died, and both He and the Father hold them safely through all temptations, for the Father and the Son are one God (10:14-15, 27-30). Though the exalted Lord Jesus rules over all mankind, He gives eternal life only to those given to Him by the Father, and He intercedes for them alone so that they will join Him in His glory (17:2-3, 6, 9, 24).

Regarding God's execution of His decree, the Christ-centeredness of election implies that predestination manifests itself in time when sinners trust in Christ for salvation (Eph 1:11-13). Election does not teach us that we can bypass hearing the gospel and placing our faith in Christ. Rather, whenever the gospel has been preached, "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Act 13:48). Election does not make faith superfluous to the elect; rather, saving faith is properly theirs only as "the faith of God's elect" (Ti 1:1). Thus, Paul wrote to the Thessalonian saints that he knew "your election of God" by the fact that "our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance...And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord" (1Th 1:4-6). Calvin said, "How do we know that God has elected us before the creation of the world? By believing in Jesus Christ." Therefore, the doctrine of election does not discourage people from believing the gospel but encourages them to trust in Christ and find assurance in Christ, for our election is in Him. Election is a friend of penitent sinners, for without it no one would ever be saved. However, election by itself does not save sinners; the electing God saves sinners through the work of Christ. Though God justifies the elect when they come to faith (Rom 8:33; cf. Gal 2:16), their freedom from condemnation stands only upon Christ's death and exaltation (Rom 8:34).

Fourth, election consists of *God's sovereign selection of whom He will save*. God "hath blessed us...according as he hath chosen us" (Eph 1:3-4). The word translated as "according as" (*kathōs*), a term of comparison, can show what causes or controls something. The combination of "according as" or "even as" with a verb of will expresses a free and sovereign choice. God's predestination of certain people to adoption was "according to the good pleasure of his will" (v. 5). Therefore, the reason God blessed us in Christ is His choice or election of us. Furthermore, Paul did not write that God chose a course of action, such as to save the people who trusted in Him, but that God chose people ("us"), selecting which individuals He would bless.

Christ taught that according to the Father's "good pleasure" (*eudokia*), God hides salvation from some sinners and reveals Himself to others as the Son "wills" (*boulomai*, Mat 11:25-27; Luk 10:21-22). Believers can rejoice because "your names are written in heaven" (Luk 10:20). Here a heavenly book symbolizes God's particular, personal predestination. Believers' names are "written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" (Rev 17:8).

Predestination is not a limitation on the gospel call, for the message to come to Christ goes out to all who hear it (Mat 11:28; 22:9). However, only the elect respond rightly, "for many are called, but few are chosen" (22:14). It is the elect who will be saved in the end, despite the many temptations and tribulations to come upon the world. When God's saints stand before Christ on judgment day and their good works testify to the genuineness of their salvation, Christ will tell them that the kingdom into which they are welcomed was "prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34).

Fifth, election is *an aspect of God's eternal decree of all things.* God chose His saints "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). He "predestinated us...to himself" (v. 5). The word translated as "predestine" (*proorizō*) means to decide or decree something beforehand. In the New Testament, it is always used of God's plan. Paul uses the same word again when he writes that God's saints were "predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (v. 11). Hence, election unto salvation is part of the larger, universal decree by which God rules all things that take place.

The eternity of election shows that it was utterly free and based upon nothing in us. Neither we nor our actions existed when God made us His choice, for we were "not yet born" (Rom 9:11). Eternal election is sheer grace. It leads to salvation by the grace of God alone, "who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2Ti 1:9).

One consequence of locating election in the larger decree is that the goals of election cannot be attained apart from the means decreed by God. Salvation is a golden chain in which each part is linked with the others: "whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). The elect must and will hear the gospel call, respond with justifying faith, and persevere in faith unto glory.

Sixth, election is *the root of the Christian's holiness.* God chose us "that

we should be holy and without blame before him” (Eph 1:4). The Greek syntax does not communicate our obligation to be holy, but God’s purpose to make us holy. All holiness arises from God’s eternal election of His people, for election results in union with Christ. Paul writes, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Ames said, “There is no inward difference in the predestined until the actual application of it,”⁹ citing Ephesians 2:3, which says that those presently saved formerly “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” This is a humbling truth, but one that strengthens dependence upon the Lord. Calvin said, “For what is more consonant [fitting] with faith than to recognize that we are naked of all virtue, in order to be clothed by God? That we are empty of all good, to be filled by him?”¹⁰

There is no holiness apart from vital union with Christ by faith, for Christ is the vine and His disciples are the branches that bear fruit only by abiding in the vine (Joh 15:5). It is the responsibility of Christ’s disciples to abide in Him (v. 4) and in His love (v. 9) by receiving His Word (vv. 3, 7) and keeping His commandments (v. 10). However, Christ also told His disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you... If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (vv. 16, 19). Therefore, a Christian’s fruitfulness, prayer life, and separation from the world proceed ultimately from the Lord’s electing him for holiness.

The unbreakable link between election and holiness defeats both legalism and antinomianism. The legalist would claim that God chose us because we were worthier than others, but in reality, all our holiness results from God’s election of grace (2Th 2:13) with no regard to the worthiness of our works (Rom 11:5-6). The antinomian would claim that if God chose us, then we will be saved regardless of how we live, but the Scriptures teach that God’s election manifests itself in a holy calling that creates a faithful person who overcomes the world through Christ (Rev 17:14). Only by adding to his faith virtue, knowledge, self-

⁹ William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.25.2, ed. Eusden (Boston; Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1968), 152.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, trans. Battles, Vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 13.

control, patience, godliness, brotherly affection, and love does a person make his “calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:4-10). The biblical doctrine of election promotes holiness, for it warns us that we can have no assurance of our election apart from a godly life, and it impresses upon believers that their Father’s loving purpose for His elect children is that they become perfectly holy. Calvin said, “Our election must be as a root that yields good fruits.”¹¹

Seventh, election aims at *the praise of God’s glory*. God chose and predestinated His people “to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:6). Paul repeats the same idea in verses 12 and 14, indicating that God directs all of salvation “to the praise of his glory.” Calvin said that “we must be...inflamed to give ourselves wholly to His praise.” Hodge wrote, “The design of redemption, therefore, is to exhibit the grace of God in such a conspicuous manner as to fill all hearts with wonder and all lips with praise.” God predestined people to eternal life “that he might make known the riches of his glory” (Rom 9:23). Christ is our model and leader in how to respond to this, for He joyfully praised God for His sovereign distribution of grace to whomsoever He pleased (Luk 10:21).

The doctrine of predestination especially demonstrates the glory of divine “grace” (Eph 1:6). Election highlights the absolutely gracious character of salvation. Many in Israel sought to build their righteousness upon their own works of keeping the law, and Christ was received only by “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5). Paul concludes, “If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace” (v. 6). He also writes, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1Co 1:27; cf. Jam 2:5). Why? “That no flesh should glory in his presence” (v. 29). All is of grace.

Consider how God’s election of His people magnifies the glory of His grace. We see the glorious Trinity at work as the Father covenants with His Son as the Mediator of grace; God’s glorious sovereignty to dispense grace to His creatures as He wills; God’s eternity, for He decrees the application of grace before time began; God’s glorious mercy in choosing the unworthy for boundless blessings of grace; God’s glorious righteousness because His election brings sinners to holiness by grace; and God’s glorious love when His predestination results in the adoption of sinners as His sons and daughters.

¹¹ Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, 35.

Since election was an act of glorious grace, it offends our self-righteousness, for it strips us of our delusions of merit and power. However, gracious election is good news to those deeply convinced of their sinfulness and weakness. They see themselves as spiritually poor, and they hunger and thirst for what they cannot deserve. As Baynes observed, hunger is the sauce that makes everything taste good, and therefore the more we are poor in spirit, the more we will savor the grace of God.¹² Thus, election becomes delicious to the soul as it marvels, “Why would God choose me? Glory be to His amazing grace!” Though once “not a people” and with no claim on mercy, believers find to their joy that they “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9-10).

In summary, we define divine election as follows: Election is that aspect of God’s eternal decree of all things in which He sovereignly and lovingly selects, according to the incomprehensible counsel of His will alone and nothing good foreseen in us, those whom He will effectually call, justify, sanctify, and glorify by union with Jesus Christ, for the Father entered into an eternal covenant with Christ that He should be the Mediator of grace applied by the Spirit through God’s appointed means, to the praise of God’s glory alone.

From *Reformed Systematic Theology: Revelation and God*, Vol. 1
(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 981-989.

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The rewards of the elect shall never be ended, therefore the punishment of the damned shall never be ended because as the mercy of God is infinite towards the elect, so the justice of God is infinite towards the reprobate in hell. The reprobate shall have punishment without pity, misery without mercy, sorrow without succor, crying without compassion, mischief without measure, and torment without end.—*Thomas Brooks*

The Bible never says that sinners miss heaven because they are not elect, but because they “neglect so great salvation” (Heb 2:3) and because they will not repent and believe.—*J. C. Ryle*

¹² Bayne[s], *Ephesians*, 16.

REPROBATION, THE DECREE OF GOD

Robert Purnell (1606-1666)

REPROBATION is the wise, just, and absolute decree of God, passing by and leaving some men unto themselves, to suffer them to fall, and to inflict upon them eternal punishment deserved by their sins, for the praise of His unspeakable great justice (Rom 9:11, 13, 22; Jude 4; Jer 6:30).

The causes of this decree are the absolute will and good pleasure of God (Mat 11:26; Rom 9:13).

The end of this decree is not the condemnation of the creature, but the manifestation of God's justice (Rom 9:22). Yet election and reprobation, in a sense, are not the *causes* of salvation and damnation: Christ is the proper and meritorious cause of salvation; sin [is] the proper and meritorious cause of damnation. Election and reprobation are but precedent¹ acts or decrees, and the causes of salvation and damnation come in between the causes and the execution thereof. It is the fore appointment of certain angels and men unto everlasting dishonor: God of His own free will determining to pass them by, refuse, or cast off, and for sin to condemn and punish them with everlasting death (Pro 16:4; Exo 9:16; Rom 9:17; 2Ti 2:20; Mat 25:41).

From *A Little Cabinet: Richly Stored with All Sorts of Heavenly Varieties and Soul-Reviving Influences* (London: Thomas Brewster, 1657), 8.



The marriage of the Lamb is the result of the eternal gift of the Father. Our Lord says, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." His prayer was, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (Joh 17:24). The Father made a choice, and the chosen He gave to His Son to be His portion. For them, He entered a covenant of redemption, whereby He was pledged in due time to take upon Himself their nature, pay the penalty of their offences, and set them free to be His own. Beloved, that which was arranged in the councils of eternity and settled there between the high contracting parties is brought to its ultimate end in that day when the Lamb takes unto Himself in everlasting union the whole of those whom His Father gave Him from of old.—*Charles Spurgeon*

Reprobation is that aspect of God's eternal decree of all things in which He sovereignly selects, according to the incomprehensible counsel of His will, which people

He will abandon to their sins, not by inducing them to sin but
by freely withholding His unmerited grace and will
justly damn forever because of their sins,
to the praise of His glory.

—*Beeke & Smalley*

¹ precedent – earlier.

HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)

THE doctrine of absolute predestination, of course, logically holds that some are foreordained to death as truly as others are foreordained to life. The very terms *elect* and *election* imply the terms *non-elect* and *reprobation*. When some are chosen out, others are left not chosen. The high privileges and glorious destiny of the former are not shared with the latter. This, too, is of God. We believe that from all eternity God has intended to leave some of Adam's posterity in their sins and that the decisive factor in the life of each is to be found only in God's will. As Mozley has said, the whole race after the Fall was "one mass of perdition," and, "it pleased God of His sovereign mercy to rescue some and to leave others where they were; to raise some to glory, giving them such grace as necessarily qualified them for it, and abandon the rest, from whom He withheld such grace, to eternal punishment."¹

The chief difficulty with the doctrine of election, of course, arises regarding the unsaved, and the Scriptures have given us no extended explanation of their state. Since the mission of Jesus in the world was to save the world rather than to judge it, this side of the matter is less dwelt upon.

In all the Reformed creeds in which the doctrine of reprobation is dealt with at all, it is treated as an essential part of the doctrine of predestination. The Westminster Confession, after stating the doctrine of election, adds, "The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the inscrutable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice."

Those who hold the doctrine of election but deny that of reprobation can lay but little claim to consistency. To affirm the former while denying the latter makes the decree of predestination an illogical and lopsided decree. The creed that states the former but denies the latter will resemble a wounded eagle attempting to fly with but one wing...

This is admittedly an unpleasant doctrine. It is not taught to gain

¹ J. B. Mozley, *A Treatise on the Augustinian Doctrine of Predestination* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1855), 297.

favor with men, but only because it is the plain teaching of the Scriptures and the logical counterpart of the doctrine of election. We shall find that some Scripture passages do teach the doctrine with unmistakable clearness. These should be sufficient for anyone who accepts the Bible as the Word of God: “The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Pro 16:4). Christ is said to be to the wicked “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1Pe 2:8). “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness,² and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). “But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2Pe 2:12). “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev 17:17). Concerning the beast of St. John’s vision it is said, “All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8); and we may contrast these with the disciples whom Jesus told to rejoice because their names were written in heaven (Luk 10:20), and with Paul’s fellow-workers, “whose names are in the book of life” (Phi 4:3).

Paul declares that the “vessels of wrath,” which by the Lord were “fitted to destruction,” were “endured with much longsuffering” in order that He might “shew his wrath, and...make his power known”; and with these are contrasted the “vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” in order “that he might make known the riches of his glory” upon them (Rom 9:22-23). Concerning the heathen, it is said, “God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom 1:28); and the wicked, “after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5).

Regarding those who perish, Paul says, “God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2Th 2:11). They are called upon to behold these things in an external way, to wonder at them, and to go on perishing in their sins. Hear the words of Paul in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia: “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise

² lasciviousness – unbridled lust.

believe, though a man declare it unto you” (Act 13:41).

The apostle John, after narrating that the people still disbelieved although Jesus had done so many signs before them, adds, “Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (Joh 12:39-40).

Christ’s command to the wicked in the final judgment, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mat 25:41), is the strongest possible decree of reprobation; and it is the same in principle whether issued in time or eternity. What is right for God to do in time is not wrong for Him to include in His eternal plan.

On one occasion Jesus Himself declared, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (Joh 9:39). On another occasion, He said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Mat 11:25). It is hard for us to realize that the adorable Redeemer and only Savior of men is, to some, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence; yet that is what the Scriptures declare Him to be. Even before His birth it was said that He was set (that is, appointed) for the falling, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel (Luk 2:34). And when, in His intercessory prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, “I pray for them: I pray *not* for the world, but for them which thou hast given me” (Joh 17:9), the non-elect were repudiated in so many words. Jesus Himself declared that one of the reasons why He spoke in parables was that the truth might be concealed from those for whom it was not intended. We shall let the sacred history speak for itself: “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should

understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Mat 13:10-15; Isa 6:9-10).

In these words, we have an application of Jesus’ words: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Mat 7:6). He who affirms that Christ designed to give His saving truth to everyone flatly contradicts Christ Himself. To the non-elect, the Bible is a sealed book; and only to the true Christian is it “given” to see and understand these things. So important is this truth that the Holy Spirit has been pleased to repeat six times over in the New Testament this passage from Isaiah (Mat 13:14-15; Mar 4:12; Luk 8:10; Joh 12:40; Act 28:27; Rom 11:9-10). Paul tells us that through grace the “election” received salvation, and that the rest were hardened; then he adds, “God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear” (Rom 11:8). And further, he quotes the words of David to the same effect: “(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway” (Rom 11:8-10). Hence as regards some, the evangelical proclamations were designed to harden and not to heal.

This same doctrine finds expression in numerous other parts of Scripture. Moses said to the children of Israel, “But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day” (Deu 2:30). Regarding the Canaanitish tribes who came against Joshua, it is written, “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses” (Jos 11:20). Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, when reprov'd for their wickedness, “hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them” (1Sa 2:25). Though Pharaoh acted very arrogantly and wickedly toward the Israelites, Paul assigns no other reason than that he was one of the reprobate, whose evil actions were to be overruled for good: “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom 9:17; see also Exo 9:16). In all the reprobate, there is a blindness and an obstinate hardness of heart; and when any,

like Pharaoh, are said to have been hardened of God, we may be sure that they were already in themselves worthy of being delivered over to Satan. The hearts of the wicked are, of course, never hardened by the direct influence of God. He simply permits some men to follow out the evil impulses that are already in their hearts, so that, because of their own choices, they become increasingly calloused and obstinate. And while it is said, for instance, that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, it is also said that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exo 8:15; 8:32; 9:34). One description is given from the divine viewpoint, the other is given from the human viewpoint. God is ultimately responsible for the hardening of the heart in that He permits it to occur, and the inspired writer in graphic language simply says that God does it; but never are we to understand that God is the immediate and efficient cause.

Although this doctrine is harsh, it is, nevertheless, scriptural. And since it is so plainly taught in Scripture, we can assign no reason for the opposition that it has met other than the pure ignorance and unreasoned prejudice with which men's minds have been filled when they come to study it. How applicable here are the words of N. L. Rice: "Happy would it be for the church of Christ and for the world, if Christian ministers and Christian people could be contented to be disciples—*learners*; if, conscious of their limited faculties, their ignorance of divine things, and their proneness to err through depravity and prejudice, they could be induced to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of Him. The church has been corrupted and cursed in almost every age by the undue confidence of men in their reasoning powers. They have undertaken to pronounce upon the reasonableness or unreasonableness of doctrines infinitely above their reason, which are necessarily matters of pure revelation. In their presumption they have sought to comprehend 'the deep things of God,' and have interpreted the Scriptures, not according to their obvious meaning, but according to the decisions of the finite reason."³

From *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 109-113.

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990): American Presbyterian theologian; born in Linden, MO, USA.



If we have salvation, we have election.—*Charles Spurgeon*

³ N. L. Rice, *God Sovereign and Man Free* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850), iii.

ELECTION AND EVANGELISM

Robert B. Selph

OUR sovereign Lord of the harvest has not only established His eternal purpose to save certain and specific sinners by His grace, but also He has ordained the means by which they will be converted to Him: He has commissioned His church in no uncertain terms to proclaim the “good news” of the gospel. The church has been given the task and privilege to command all men everywhere to repent and to trust Christ alone for salvation. We see these commands throughout the Scriptures, and these commands alone ought to be sufficient reason to evangelize—even if we humanly cannot reconcile this duty with God’s sovereign election. Such passages include Mat 28:18-20; Mar 16:15; Luk 24:46-47; Act 1:8; 1Co 9:19-27; 2Co 5:18-20; and 2Ti 4:5.

We can also be assured that no one will be converted to Christ without the gospel being presented to him in some way (Rom 10:13-15). Missions are imperative in God’s sovereign plan to save His people from their sin (Mat 1:21). He has so designed redemption that no one may be saved without believing the gospel of Christ, including the heathen who have never heard.

We freely send the gospel call to every person in the earth. We do not try to determine their elect or non-elect status before [preaching] the gospel. There are no national boundaries, a more likely color of skin, or any discrimination whatsoever toward individuals to whom we make known the gospel. God will gather “his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat 24:31). His redeemed elect will represent every tribe, tongue, people, and nation of the earth in a heaven of glory (Rev 5:9); and He will use His church to bring the strangers home.

Jesus said in John 6:37, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” We sow the seed of the gospel with the certainty that all Christ’s sheep will hear His voice, and they will follow Him (Joh 10:27). Success in evangelism is not dependent on my persuasion, my skill, my programming, my personality. Success in evangelism is in God’s hands. He alone can open a Lydia’s heart (Act 16:14). He alone can transform a Saul of Tarsus. He alone can bring repentance to a captive (1Ti 2:25). We plant and water; it is God alone Who gives the increase (1Co 3:7). It is solely of Him that we are in Christ Jesus (1Co 1:30)—and nothing

of ourselves. He makes His people willing in the day of His power (Psa 110:3) and causes the man whom He has chosen to come to Him (Psa 65:4). Whether men reject or receive the gospel, the faithful gospel-sower is a victor (2Co 2:14-17). Our first and last duty is to be faithful in the sight of God as a diffuser of the fragrance of Christ to all around us. In this we triumph, not in the securing of results ourselves.

What a great encouragement! We know that God *will* save His people. We know that as we proclaim the great invitations of the Bible—“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters” (Isa 55:1-3); “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden” (Mat 11:28); and, “Let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17)—we are assured that God’s elect will eventually respond (Act 13:48).

Every soul who has been foreloved and predestinated will, without exception, respond to the powerful call of the Holy Spirit as the gospel is preached (Rom 8:29-30). If folks do not respond to the gospel, the fault is not in a weak, helpless gospel or in an impotent savior who can do nothing to budge sovereign man (Rom 9:6-16). Man’s response to the gospel is bound up in a sovereign God and His purpose of election (Rom 9:11-24), which is true not only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles of all nations.

God saves men by His truth. Our duty is to deliver the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Please do not read into this statement a lack of love. In matters of such eternal importance, it is less than true love that would not be completely honest with people about their souls. We are not peddling the Word of God (2Co 2:17), nor do we hide or disguise any part of the gospel—that would be dishonest (2Co 4:2-3). Paul [spoke of] “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15), but we must make certain that we speak the whole truth.

Jesus set the tone by preaching and pressing repentance. He did not leave the doctrine of repentance out of the pulpit.

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KNOWING YOUR ELECTION

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

IT is very dangerous to indulge a spirit of curiosity respecting the deep things of God. There are mysteries in the kingdom of grace and in the kingdom of nature, which surpass the highest powers of created intelligence to comprehend. But, as in the natural world, enough is made level to our capacity to render us comfortable and happy with respect to food, clothing, and other temporal conveniences; so likewise, in things pertaining to the spiritual world, sufficient is revealed to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

That desire of being wise above what is written, which is the effect of a proud, unhallowed¹ curiosity, is strongly reprehended in the Holy Scriptures. Our blessed Lord frequently repressed this spirit of curious inquiry that is so natural to us. When one asked Him, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” (Luk 13:23), His practical answer was, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate” (v. 24). It was as if He had said, “Trouble not yourself about the secret counsels of heaven; take heed to yourself, or you shall likewise perish.”

At another time, when His disciples asked Him, saying, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Act 1:6), He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (v. 7). When Jesus had been foretelling Peter by what death he should glorify God, Peter, seeing John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, felt a curiosity to know what would become of him also and said, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” (Joh 21:21). Jesus said unto him, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me” (v. 22). Thus, we see how pointedly our Lord checked that prying into secret things, which, if indulged, would take us from the plain path of childlike obedience and draw us into labyrinths where our minds would soon be “in wandering mazes lost.”²

But although we cannot fathom, we are nevertheless to believe from the heart the mysterious truths of God. Should any of these truths seem to contradict each other, it arises altogether from the finite nature of our own minds. Instead, therefore, of laboring to reconcile the apparently opposing statements of eternal truth by systems of human

¹ **unhallowed** – unholy.

² John Milton (1608-1674), *Paradise Lost: The Second Book*.

invention, it is the part of humility to receive each in the simplicity of faith, as God has been pleased to reveal them to us in His holy Word. By adopting this mode, we shall not be shackled by human opinion nor be afraid of inconsistency while we state the simple truth as it is in Jesus.

How rich, how full, and how extensive are the blessings that Paul declared to the Thessalonian church. They reach from everlasting to everlasting and are calculated to animate all true believers to works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope, since He Who has promised is faithful and will never forsake the work of His own hands. “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Th 2:13-14).

Some may ask, “How could the apostle know that the Thessalonians were the chosen of God? Had he ever been favored with a view of the Book of Life? Had he ever seen their names written in heaven? Had he ever explored the secret decrees and counsels of the Almighty?” No. This eminent servant of Christ searched another book, even the volume of grace, the revealed Word of God. There he discovered the clear marks and evidences of God’s redeemed people. And being himself under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was enabled to draw just conclusions respecting the state and character of those who embraced the gospel.

In the first chapter of this epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle displays in glowing colors the faith, love, patience, zeal, and hope of this infant church in their readiness to receive the Word, their professed subjection to the gospel, their cheerful waiting for Christ, and their joy under manifold afflictions. Hence, he drew the conclusion that they were the chosen of God: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1Th 1:4)...All, then, who truly believe in Jesus and who are renewed in the spirit of their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit evidence their election of God. “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13).

But another work of grace is mentioned by the apostle: they were effectually called by the gospel. Thousands are called by the faithful preaching of the gospel every Sabbath day to flee from the wrath to come and to lay hold on the hope set before them in a crucified Savior.

Yet how few obey the call and come unto Jesus, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of their sins.

How few are effectually called! The great mass of baptized Christians hears the words of life but regards them not. They love the world and cling to it. They love sin and will not part with it. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil (Joh 3:19). And if it be asked, "Why do they thus act?" the answer is given by Paul himself, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2Co 4:3-4).

We may therefore conclude that all who believingly obey the call of mercy and draw near unto God through Jesus Christ evidence their election of God, according to the plain, grammatical meaning of the apostle's declaration.

The other blessing mentioned by Paul, and which crowns the whole, is the eternal glorification of all who are thus effectually called and evidence their election in Christ by faith and holiness: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Th 2:14). Our divine Master has declared, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Mat 10:22). Peter assured the Christian strangers who were scattered abroad that they were "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1Pe 1:5).

Hence, it follows that all who are effectually called by the gospel shall finally obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, being preserved through faith unto God's everlasting kingdom. Thus, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The gospel is designed to stain the pride of human glory and to lay man in the dust of humiliation: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:8-10). Such is the humbling, yet delightful, language of the inspired apostle.

The carnal heart rises against these abasing, purifying doctrines of the cross, which strip the sinner of all self-righteous dependence and strike at the root of all fleshly indulgences. The proud sinner must become a fool in his own estimation and feel himself to be nothing before

he can receive with gratitude these stupendous blessings offered for his acceptance in the gospel.

Divine grace alone can effect this mighty change. But what cannot the power of omnipotence accomplish? “Yea, before the day was I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?” (Isa 43:13) is the voice of the Sovereign, “who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11), and Who has said: “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10).

Man, if left to himself, would never seek after God. His language is, “I have loved strangers, and after them will I go” (Jer 2:25). But when God says, “*Live*,” the soul shall as assuredly live as when at the creation He said, “Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen 1:3). The chaotic mass was formed to order and beauty when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep, and so shall the disordered soul be transformed after the divine image when almighty grace puts forth its new creating power. “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise” (Isa 43:21).

When the leper said, “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Mar 1:40), Jesus replied: “I will; be thou clean. And...immediately the leprosy departed from him” (vv. 41-42). In Jesus, we behold “the mighty God” (Gen 49:24), “God...manifest in the flesh” (1Ti 3:16), exerting His benevolent power in healing diseases, in stilling the raging elements, in casting out devils, in multiplying provisions, in raising the dead, in revealing men’s thoughts, in forgiving sin.

And now that He is in glory and reigns as sovereign Lord, no darkness of the understanding, no hardness of the heart, no rebellion of the will, no alienation of the affection, no outward opposition or inward repugnance³ to the truth, can prevent the conversion and final salvation of that soul whom God loves with an everlasting love and draws with lovingkindness to the cross of Christ. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). This is the wonderful announcement of the messengers of peace.

As believers in Jesus are declared to be chosen in Him before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph 1:4), so the change that passes upon the soul when brought by the Spirit to the love and practice of holiness—as evidential of its election in Christ—is described in Scripture by the

³ **repugnance** – intense disgust.

boldest figures. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1Jo 3:14). "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8). "Giving thanks unto the Father...Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:12-13), "...that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1Pe 2:9). "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:5). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2Co 5:17).

This blessed conversion from sin to holiness is thus declared by the apostle to the Romans: "Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom 6:17). To the Thessalonians: "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1Th 1:9). To the Corinthians: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?...And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1Co 6:9, 11).

The way and means of the church's salvation were also foreordained. Jesus is declared to be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Faith is the divinely appointed instrument by which the sinner is enabled to lay hold on Christ. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who ask for this unspeakable gift. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isa 55:1) is the gracious call.

The gospel is designed to be a universal blessing, for the command is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mar 16:15). The invitation is general; the command to preach the gospel is unlimited. None are excluded but such as, through unbelief, exclude themselves; for God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze 33:11); He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9); He "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1Ti 2:4).

Such are the views which God's infinite wisdom and love have given us in the pages of inspired truth. Eternal misery is there declared to be the fruit of man's willful apostasy and rebellion, and eternal happiness to be the free gift of sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. Thrice happy, then, are they who experience the saving grace of God: who hear in faith, who obey the call of mercy, and who follow the Lord fully and

perseveringly in filial⁴ obedience. These are the objects of the Savior's love and care, theirs are the promises, and to them belong the glories that shall shortly be revealed. Oh, happy people, saved by the Lord!

“Blessed Savior, draw my heart sweetly and powerfully to Thyself. Oh, make me Thy temple! May Thy Word reach my heart and Thy love constrain my soul to love and obedience. Like Matthew, may I cheerfully obey Thy call, leave all, and follow Thee. Subdue every rebellious inclination and let nothing dwell within me that is contrary to Thy will. Root out of my heart all evil affections and fill me with the fruits of righteousness. May my happy position ever be at the foot of the cross. There, wean⁵ my heart from earthly things and bind me to Thyself by cords of everlasting love. Oh, let me never, never wander from Thee, but preserve me to Thy kingdom and glory for Thine infinite mercies' sake.”

From *Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*, Reformation Heritage Books,
www.heritagebooks.org; used by permission.

Thomas Reade (1776-1841): English layman and author; born in Manchester, England, UK.



The comfort of the believer against the miseries of this short life is taken from the decree of their election and the eternal covenant of redemption, settled in the purpose and counsel of the blessed Trinity for their [benefit,] wherein it was agreed before the world was that the *Word* to be incarnate should be the Savior of the elect. For here, the asserting of the eternity of God is with relation to His own chosen people; for “Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations” (Psa 90:1), and, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psa 90:2) is in substance this much: Thou art from everlasting to everlasting the same unchangeable God in purpose and affection toward us Thy people, and so Thou art *our God* from everlasting in regard of Thy eternal purpose of love, electing us, and in regard of Thy appointing redemption for us by the Redeemer.—*David Dickson*

Election can only be known by its fruits. The elect of God can only be discerned from those who are not elect by their faith and life. We cannot climb up into the secret of God's eternal counsels. We cannot read the Book of Life. The fruits of the Spirit, seen and manifested in a man's conversation, are the only grounds on which we can ascertain that he is one of God's elect. Where the marks of God's elect can be seen, there, and there only, have we any warrant for saying,

“This is one of the elect”...Just so it is with God's election. The eternal decree we cannot possibly see. But the result of that decree cannot be hidden.

—*J. C. Ryle*

⁴ **filial** – fitting for a son or daughter.

⁵ **wean** – withdraw.

CHOSEN TO BE LIKE CHRIST

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.—Romans 8:29

PREDESTINATION, in its lowest sense, is understood to mean the exclusive agency of God in producing every event. But it includes more than this: it takes in God's predeterminate appointment and fore arrangement of a thing beforehand, according to His divine and supreme will. The Greek is so rendered: "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Act 4:28). Again, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph 1:5). It is here affirmed of God that the same prearrangement and predetermination that men in general are agreed to ascribe to Him in the government of *matter* extends equally, and with yet stronger force, to the concerns of His *moral* administration. It would seem impossible to form any correct idea of God disassociated from the idea of predestination.

The sole basis of predestination is the practical belief that God is eternal and infinite in and over all... Yet how marvelously difficult is it to win the mind to a full, unwavering [agreement] in a truth which, in a different application, is received with unquestioning readiness! And what is there in the application of this law of the divine government to the world of *matter*, which is not equally reasonable and fit in its application to the world of *mind*? If it is necessary and proper in the *material*, why should it not be equally or more so in the *spiritual* empire? If God is allowed the full exercise of a sovereignty in the one, why should He be excluded from an unlimited sovereignty in the other? Surely, it were even more worthy of Him that He should prearrange, predetermine, and supremely rule in the concerns of a world over which His more dignified and glorious empire extends than that in the inferior world of matter He should fix a constellation in the heavens, guide the gyrations of a bird in the air, direct the falling of an autumn leaf in the pathless desert, or convey the seed, borne upon the wind, to the spot in which it should fall. Surely, if no [accidental] ordering is admitted in the one case, on infinitely stronger grounds it should be excluded from the other. Upon no other basis could divine foreknowledge and providence take their stand than upon this. Disconnected from the will and

purpose of God, there could be nothing certain as to the future; consequently, there could be nothing certainly foreknown. And were not providence to regulate and control persons, things, and events—every dispensation, in fact—by the same preconstructed plan, it would follow that God would be exposed to a thousand [possibilities] unforeseen, or else that He acts ignorantly or contrary to His will. What, then, is predestination but God’s determining will?

Now, all this will apply with augmented beauty and force to the idea of a predestinated church. How clearly is this doctrine revealed! “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate” (Rom 8:29). “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). “And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Act 13:48). “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1Th 1:4). “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2Th 2:13). “Whose names are...written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Rev 17:8). “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9). “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1Pe 1:2). “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34). What an accumulation of evidence in proof of a single doctrine of Scripture! Who but the most prejudiced can resist, or the most skeptical deny its overwhelming force? Oh, to receive it as the Word of God!

To admit it, not because reason can understand, or man can explain it—for all truth flowing from an infinite source must necessarily transcend a finite mind—but *because we find it in God’s holy Word*. But it is not so much our province¹ to establish the truth of this doctrine and explain its reasonableness and the harmony of its relations as to trace its sanctifying tendency and effect. Predestination must be a divine verity since it stands essentially connected with our conformity to the divine image. Predestinated “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). Addressing ourselves to this deeply interesting and important branch of our subject, let us first contemplate the believer’s model.

“The image of his Son”—no standard short of this will meet the case. How conspicuous appears the wisdom and how glorious the goodness of God in this, that in making us holy, the model or standard of that holiness should be deity itself! God would make us holy; and in doing

¹ province – responsibility; concern.

so, He would make us like Himself.

But with what pencil—dipped though it were in heaven’s brightest hues—can we portray the image of Jesus? The perfection of our Lord was the perfection of holiness. His deity, essential holiness—His humanity without sin, the impersonation of holiness, all that He was, said, and did—was as coruscations² of holiness emanating from the fountain of essential purity and kindling their dazzling and undying radiance around each step He trod.

How lowly, too, His character! How holy the thoughts He breathed, how pure the words He spake, how humble the spirit He exemplified, how tender and sympathizing the outgoings of His compassion and love to man!—“the chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely” (Song 5:10, 16). Such is the believer’s model. To this he is predestinated to be conformed. And is not this predestination in its highest form? Would it seem possible for God to have preordained us to a greater blessing, to have chosen us to a higher distinction? In choosing us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy, He has advanced us to the loftiest degree of honor and happiness to which a creature can be promoted—assimilation to His own moral image. And this forms the highest ambition of the believer. To transcribe those beautiful lineaments³ which, in such perfect harmony and beautiful expression, blended and shone in the life of Jesus, is the great study of all His true disciples. But in what does this conformity consist?

The first feature is a conformity of nature. And this is reciprocal.⁴ The Son of God, by an act of divine power, became human; the saints of God, by an act of sovereign grace, become divine—“Partakers of the divine nature” (2Pe 1:4). This harmony of nature forms the basis of all conformity. Thus grafted into Christ, we grow up into Him in all holy resemblance. The meekness, the holiness, the patience, the self-denial, the zeal, the love, traceable—faint and imperfect indeed—in us are transfers of Christ’s beautiful and faultless lineaments to our renewed soul. Thus, the mind that was in Him is in some measure in us. And in our moral conflict, battling as we do with sin, Satan, and the world, we come to know a little of fellowship with His sufferings and conformity to His death. We are here supplied with a test of Christian character.

It is an anxious question with many professors of Christ: “How may I arrive at a correct conclusion that I am amongst the predestinated of

² **coruscations** – flashes of light.

³ **lineaments** – distinctive features.

⁴ **reciprocal** – given or done in return.

God?—that I am included in His purpose of grace and love?—that I have an interest in the Lord’s salvation?” The passage under consideration supplies the answer: conformity to the image of God’s Son. Nothing short of this can justify the belief that we are saved. No evidence less strong can authenticate the fact of our predestination.

The determination of God to save men is not so fixed as to save them be their character what it may. Christ’s work is a salvation *from* sin, not *in* sin. “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy” (Eph 1:4). In other words, that we should be conformed to the divine image. That we should be like Christ: like Christ in His divine nature; like Christ in the purity of His human nature; like Christ in the humility He exemplified, in the self-denial He practiced, in the heavenly life He lived. In a word, in all that this expressive sentence comprehends: “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). And as we grow day by day more holy, more spiritually minded, more closely resembling Jesus, we are placing the truth of our predestination to eternal life in a clearer, stronger light, and consequently the fact of our salvation beyond a misgiving and a doubt. In view of this precious truth, what spiritual heart will not breathe the prayer, “O Lord! I cannot be satisfied merely to profess and call myself Thine. I want more of the power of vital religion in my soul. I pant for Thine image. My deepest grief springs from the discovery of the little real resemblance that I bear to a model so peerless, so divine—that I exemplify so little of Thy patience in suffering; Thy meekness in opposition; Thy forgiving spirit in injury; Thy gentleness in reproving; Thy firmness in temptation; Thy singleness of eye in all that I do. Oh, transfer Thyself wholly to me. What were this world, yes, what were heaven itself, without Thee? A universe of creatures, the fondest, the holiest, could not be Thy substitute to my yearning, longing soul, O Lord! Come, and occupy Thine own place in my heart. Wake it to Thy love. Sweep Thou its chords with Thy gentle hand, and it shall breathe sweet music to Thy dear name.”

From *No Condemnation in Christ Jesus*, in the public domain.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Baptist pastor and prolific author; later an Anglican priest; born in Pentonville, England, UK.



It is one of Satan’s chief devices to make the gospel odious by tempting men to distort it. Perhaps no part of Christian theology has suffered so much damage in this way as the doctrine of personal election.—*J. C. Ryle*