

The Doctrine of Election 10. Its Blessedness

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Transcript

The Doctrine of Election

10. Its Blessedness

First, the doctrine of election magnifies the character of God. It exemplifies His grace. Election makes known the fact that salvation is God's free gift, gratuitously bestowed upon whom He pleases. This must be so, for those who receive it are themselves no different from and no better than those who receive it not. Election allows some to go to hell, to show that all deserved to perish. But grace comes in like a dragnet and draws out from a ruined humanity a little flock, to be throughout eternity the monument of God's sovereign mercy. It exhibits His omnipotency. Election makes known the fact that God is all powerful, ruling and reigning over the earth, and declares that none can successfully resist His will or thwart His secret purposes. Election reveals God breaking down the opposition of the human heart, subduing the enmity of the carnal mind, and with irresistible power drawing His chosen ones to Christ. Election confesses that "we love him because he first loved us," and that we believe because He made us willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3). The doctrine of election ascribes all the glory to God. It disallows any credit to the creature. It denies that the unregenerate are capable of predicting a right thought, generating a right affection, or originating a right volition. It insists that God must work in us both to will and to do. It declares that repentance and faith are themselves God's gifts, and not something which the sinner contributes towards the price of his salvation. His language is, "Not unto us, not unto us," but "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." These paragraphs were written by us almost a quarter of a century since, and today we neither rescind nor modify them. "The Lord makes distinctions among guilty men according to the sovereignty of His grace. 'I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel: but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah.' Had not Judah sinned too? Might not the Lord have given up Judah also? Indeed He might justly have done so, but He delighteth in mercy. Many sin, and righteously bring upon themselves the punishment due to sin: they believe not in Christ, and die in their sins. But God has mercy, according to the greatness of His heart upon many, who could not be saved upon any other footing but that of undeserved mercy. Claiming His royal right He says, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' The prerogative of mercy is vested in the sovereignty of God: that prerogative He exercises. He gives where He pleases, and He has a right to do so, since none have any claim upon Him" (C. H. Spurgeon: "The Lord's Own Salvation"—Hos. 1:7). The above makes it sufficiently plain that it is no light thing to reject this blessed part of eternal truth: nay, it is a most solemn and serious matter so to do. God's Word is not given us to pick and choose from—to single out those portions which appeal to us, and to disdain whatever commends itself not to our reason and sentiments. It is given to us

as a whole, and by it each of us must yet be judged. To reject the grand truth we are here treating of is the height of impiety, for to repudiate the election of God is to repudiate the God of election. It is a refusal to bow before His high sovereignty. It is the corrupt preacher opposing himself against the holy Creator. It is presumptuous pride which insists upon being the determiner of its own destiny. It is the spirit of Lucifer, who said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14). Second, the blessedness of this doctrine appears in that it is all important in the plan of salvation. Consider this first from the divine side. A Scriptural presentation of this grand truth is indispensable if the distinctive acts of the triune God in salvation matters are to be recognized, honored, and owned. Salvation proceeds not from one divine person only, but equally from the everlasting three. Jehovah has so ordered things that each one in the Godhead should be magnified and glorified alike. The Father is as really and truly the Christian's Saviour as is the Lord Jesus, and so too is the Holy Spirit—note how the Father is expressly designated "God our Saviour" in Titus 3:4, as distinct from "Jesus Christ our Saviour" in verse 5. But this is ignored and lost sight of if this precious doctrine be omitted. Predestination pertains to the Father, propitiation to the Son, regeneration to the Spirit. The Father originated, the Son effectuated our salvation, and by the Spirit it is consummated. To repudiate the former is to take away the very foundation. Consider it now from the human side: election lies at the very base of a sinner's hope. By nature all are the children of wrath. In practice, all have gone astray. The whole world has become guilty before God, all are exposed to wrath, and if left to themselves would be involved in one common ruin. They are "clay of the same lump," and continuing under nature's forming hand would be all "vessels to dishonor" (Rom. 9:21). That any are saved is of the grace of God (Rom. 11:4-7). Jesus Christ, the redeemer of sinners, is Himself the elect one, as described by the prophet (Isa. 42:1). And all who shall ever be saved are elected in Him, given to Him of the Father, chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. It was to accomplish their salvation that God gave His only begotten Son, and that Jesus Christ assumed our nature and gave His life a ransom. It is to call the elect that the Scriptures are given, that ministers are sent, that the gospel is preached, and the Holy Spirit is here. It is to accomplish election that men are taught of God, drawn of the Father, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, made partakers of precious faith, endued with the spirit of adoption, the spirit of prayer, and the spirit of holiness. It is in consequence of their election that men are made obedient to the gospel, are sanctified by the Spirit, and become holy and without blame before God. Had there been no divine election, there had been no divine salvation. Nor is this a mere arbitrary assertion of ours: "Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah" (Rom. 9:29). Lost sinners cannot save themselves. God was under no obligation to save them. If He be pleased to save, He saves whom He will. Election not only lies at the foundation of a sinner's hope, but also accompanies every step of the Christian's progress to heaven. It carries to him the glad tidings of salvation. It opens his heart to receive the Saviour. It is seen in every act of faith, in every holy duty, and in every effectual prayer. It calls him. It quickens him in Christ. It beautifies his soul. It crowns him with righteousness and life and glory. It contains within it the precious assurance that "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). There was nothing in them which moved God to choose. His people, and He so deals with them as not to permit anything in or from them as to cause Him to reverse that choice. As Romans 8:30 so definitely intimates, predestination involves glorification, and therefore guarantees the supply of the elect's every need in between the two. Third, the blessedness of this doctrine appears in its essential elements. We will single out three or four of the principal of these. First, the superlative honor of being chosen by God. In all choices the person choosing puts a value on the chosen. To be selected by a king unto an office, or to be called to some employment by the state, how it will dignify a man. Thus it is in spiritual affairs. It was a special commendation of Titus that he had been "chosen of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:19). But that the great God,

the blessed and only potentate, should choose such poor, contemptible, worthless, and vile creatures as we are, passeth knowledge. Ponder 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, and see how this is there dwelt upon. How it should amaze us. How it should humble us. Note how this honorable emphasis is put upon the Lord Jesus: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen" (Matt. 12:18); so upon His members too: "The elect's sake, whom he hath chosen" (Mark 13:20). Again; the consequent excellency of this. They are the elect: the ones which God hath chosen, and doth not high worth, honor, excellency, necessarily follow from this? The chosen of God must needs be choice: the act of God makes them so. Observe the order in 1 Peter 2:6, "chief cornerstone, elect, precious"—precious because elect. Take the most eminent of God's saints, and what is their highest title and honor? This: "For David My servant's sake, whom I chose" (1 Kings 11:34). "Aaron whom He had chosen" (Ps. 105:26). Paul, "he is a chosen vessel unto Me" (Acts 9:15). "Ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people" (1 Pet. 2:9), that is, elect. That expression is taken from "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Ex. 19:5). It imports that which is dear to God: "since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable" (Isa. 43:4). Again, mark the fulness of such high privilege. "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Ps. 65:4); yea, he is "most blessed forever" (Ps. 21:6), or as the Hebrew has it (see mar.) "set for blessings," that is, set apart or appointed for naught but blessings. As the New Testament expresses it, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him" (Eph. 1:3, 4). Election, then, is the treasury-fountain of all blessedness. The elect are chosen unto the nearest approach and union unto God that is possible for creatures, to the highest communion with Himself. Consider too the time when He chose us. Paul dates it from "the beginning" (2 Thess. 2:13). God hath loved us ever since He was God, and while He is God He will continue to do so. God is from everlasting and He continues to be God to everlasting (Ps. 90:2), and His love to us is as old: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." And His love is like Himself: causeless, changeless, endless. The blessedness of election appears again in the comparative fewness of the elect. The paucity of men enjoying any privilege magnifies it the more, as in the case of the preservation of Noah and his family: "The ark . . . wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved" (1 Pet. 3:20). What a contrast was that from the whole world "of the ungodly," which all perished! The same fact and contrast was emphasized by Christ in Luke 12. "For all these things do the nations of the world seek after" (v. 30): that is, the things of time and sense, and God gives such to them. But in opposition thereto, the Lord says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (v. 32). His design was to show the greater mercy of God that so few are reserved unto spiritual and eternal favors, while all others have only material and temporal things as their portion. How this solemn fact should affect our hearts. Turn your eyes, dear reader, upon the world today, and look where you will, what do you behold? Are you not compelled to say of the present generation, in all nations alike, that God has left them to walk "in their own ways?" Must we not mournfully conclude of the men and women of this age that "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19)? The sparse number that are of God, are indeed thinly sown, a small handful of gleaning in comparison with the whole great crop of mankind. And let it not be forgotten that what appears now before our eyes is but the actualization of that which was foreordained in eternity. There is no disappointed and defeated God on the throne of the universe. He has His way "in the whirlwind and in the storm" (Nab. 1:3). And again we say how deeply should this startling contrast affect our hearts. "For a few to be singled forth and saved, when a multitude, yea, a generality of others are suffered to perish, how doth it heighten the mercy and grace of salvation to us; for God in His providence to order many outward means to deliver a few which He denies to others, who perish: how doth this affect the persons that are preserved? How much more when it is 'so great a salvation'" (T. Goodwin). This appears from what were types and mere shadows of it in Old

Testament times, as in the case of the one small family of Noah alone being spared from the universal deluge. So, too, by the example of Lot, pulled out of Sodom by the hand of angels. And why? "The Lord being merciful unto him" says Genesis 19:16. Mark what a deep sense of and valuation upon Lot had of the same: "Behold now thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life" (Gen. 19:19). But there is this further to be considered: our being delivered from a condition of like wretchedness and wrath as pertains to the non elect, which held not in the cases mentioned above. Noah was "A just man, and perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9), and Lot was "righteous" and "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7, 8). They were not guilty of those awful sins because of which God sent the flood and fire upon their fellows. But when we were ordained to salvation, we lay before God in a like condition of corruption and guilt as all mankind are in. It was only the sovereign decree of a sovereign God which purposed our being brought out of a state of sin and wrath into a state of grace and righteousness. How stupendous, then, was the mercy of God unto us, in making this difference (1 Cor. 4:7) between those in whom there was "no difference" (Rom. 3:22)! O what love, what wholehearted obedience, what praise are due unto Him. Fourth, the blessedness of this doctrine appears in that a true apprehension thereof is a great promoter of holiness. According to the divine purpose the elect are destined to a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9). In the accomplishment of that purpose, they are actually and effectually brought to holiness. God separates them from an ungodly world. He writes upon their hearts His Law and affixes to them His seal. They are made partakers of the divine nature, being renewed in the image of Him who created them. They are an habitation of God, their bodies becoming the temple of the Holy Spirit, and they are led by Him. A glorious change is thus wrought in them, transforming their character and conduct. They wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb. To them, old things are passed away and all things are become new: forgetting the things which are behind, they press forward to the things which are before. They are kings and priests unto God, and shall yet be adorned with crowns of glory. There are those who, in their ignorance, say that the doctrine of election is a licentious one, that a belief of it is calculated to produce carelessness and a sense of security in sin. Such a charge is a blasphemous reflection upon the divine author of it. This truth, as we have shown at length, occupies a prominent place in the Word of God, and that Word is holy, and the whole of it profitable for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). The apostles one and all believed and taught this doctrine, and they were promoters of piety and not encouragers of loose living. It is true that this doctrine, like every other Scripture, may be perverted by wicked men and put to an evil use, but so far as militating against the truth, it only serves to demonstrate the fearful extent of human depravity. We also grant that unregenerate men may intellectually espouse this doctrine and then settle down into a fatalistic inertia. But we emphatically deny that a heart reception thereof will produce any such effect. That faith, obedience, holiness are the inseparable consequences and fruits of election is unmistakably clear from the Scriptures (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:4-7; Titus 1:1), and has been fully set forth by us in previous chapters. How can it be otherwise? Election always involves regeneration and sanctification, and when a regenerated and sanctified soul discovers that he owes his spiritual renewal solely to the sovereign predestination of God, how can he but be truly grateful and deeply thankful? And in what other way can he express his gratitude than in a holy course of fruitful obedience? An apprehension of the everlasting love of God for him will of necessity awaken in him a responsive love to God, and wherever that exists there will be a sincere effort to please Him in all things. The fact is that a spiritual sense of the distinguishing grace of God is the most powerful constraining motive unto genuine godliness. Were we to enter into detail upon the principal elements of holiness this chapter would be extended indefinitely. A due consideration of the fact that there was nothing in us which moved God to fix His heart upon us, and that He foresaw us as ruined and hell-deserving creatures, will humble our souls as nothing else will. A

spiritual realization that all our concerns are entirely at the disposal of God, will work in us a submission to His sovereign will as nothing else can. A believing perception that God set His heart upon us from everlasting, choosing us to be His peculiar treasure, will work in us a contempt of the world. The knowledge that fellow-Christians are the elect and beloved of God will evoke love and kindness unto them. The assurance that God's eternal purpose is immutable and guarantees the supply of our every need will impart solid comfort in every trial.

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