

# The Doctrine of Election 2. Its Source

by A.W. Pink

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## Transcript

### The Doctrine of Election

#### 2. Its Source

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 of 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 then 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 (1 Tim. 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: the beginning, the matter or substance, 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. Whilst 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 which 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 which 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 of them 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" (Prov. 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 which will be magnified; in the case of the reprobate His pure justice will be glorified. What follows in this chapter will largely be an amplification of these three points. 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 or turning" (James 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 which 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 adoption 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" (Matt. 11:25, 26)—the Lord Jesus was content to rest there, and so must we be. Some of the ablest expositors of this

profound truth have affirmed that the love of God is the moving cause of our election, citing "In love having predestinated us" (Eph. 1:5); yet in so doing, we think they are chargeable with a slight inaccuracy or departure from the rule of faith. While fully agreeing that the last two words of Ephesians 1:4 (as they stand in the A.V.) belong properly to the beginning of verse 5, yet it should be carefully noted that verse 5 is not speaking of our original election, but of our being predestinated unto the adoption of children: the two things are quite distinct, separate acts on the part of God, the second following upon the first. There is an order in the divine counsels, as there is in God's works of creation, and it is as important to heed what is said of the former as it is to attend unto the divine procedure in the six days work of Genesis 1. 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 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 subsistence 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. Others have attributed our election to the grace of God, quoting "There is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). But here again we must distinguish between things that differ, namely, between the beginning of a divine decree and its matter or substance. It is true, blessedly true, that the elect are the objects upon which the grace of God is specially exercised, but that is quite another thing from saying that their election originated in God's grace. 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" (v. 4): that was the initial act in the divine mind. Second, "in love 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 grace" (Rom. 11:5), then, is not to be understood as the genitive of origin, but of object or character, as in "the Rose of Sharon," "the tree of life," "the children of disobedience." 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" (not "grace") 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 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 or not justice shall be put forth: observe carefully not "Who can by no means clear the guilty" (as is so generally misquoted), but "Who will

by no means clear the guilty" (Exod. 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 which 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, "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 for 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, then, we were elected prior to our creation, then 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. That we "should be holy" was something future, which follows upon it, and is the means to a further end, namely, our salvation, to which men are chosen. "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit" (2 Thess. 2:13). Since, then, the sanctification of God's people was the design of His election, it could not be the cause of it. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3): not merely the approving will of God, as being agreeable to His nature; nor merely His preceptive will, as required by the Law; but His decretive will, His determinate counsel. Third, nor is faith the cause of our election. How could it be? Throughout their unregeneracy 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" (Acts 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. The reason why other men do not believe, is because they are not of Christ's sheep (John 10:26); the reason why any believe is because God gives them faith, and therefore it is called "the faith of God's elect" (Titus 1:1). Fourth, it is not God's foreview of these things in men which moved Him to choose them. God's foreknowledge of the future is founded upon the determination of His will concerning it. The divine decree, the divine foreknowledge, and the divine predestination is the order set forth in the Scriptures. First, "Who are the called according to his purpose"; second, "for whom he did foreknow"; third, "he also did predestinate" (Rom. 8:28, 29). The decree of God as preceding His foreknowledge is also stated in, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). God foreknows everything that will be, because He has ordained everything that shall be; then it is to put the cart before the horse when we make foreknowledge the cause of God's election. In conclusion let it be said that the end of God in His decree of election is the manifestation of His own glory, but before entering into detail upon this point we will quote several passages which state the broad fact itself. "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself" (Ps. 4:3). "Set apart" here signifies chosen or severed from the rest; "him that is godly" refers to David himself (Ps. 89:19, 20); "for himself," and not merely for the throne and kingdom of Israel. "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure" (Ps. 135:4). "To give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. 43:20, 21), which is parallel with Ephesians 1:5, 6. So in the New Testament: when Christ was pleased to give to Ananias an account of the conversion of His beloved Paul, He said, "he is a chosen vessel unto me" (Acts 9:15). Again, "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:4 ASV), which is explained in the next verse as "a remnant according to the election of grace."

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