

SOTERIOLOGY: The Glorious Doctrine of God's Great Salvation

Lesson 3: Election

I. What do we mean by "Election"?

New Hampshire Confession of Faith, Article IX:

We believe that Election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which He graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end; that it is a most glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy and unchangeable; that it utterly excludes boasting, and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of his free mercy; that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree; that it may be ascertained by its effects in all who truly believe the Gospel; that it is the foundation of Christian assurance; and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence.

Ephesians 1:3-6

*³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as **he chose us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

What is taking place ("behind the scenes" so to speak) when we are saved?

The biblical answer is that it is an outworking of a divine CHOICE made in eternity past.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that our transition from death to life, from sinner to saint, from object of wrath to object of mercy, was the result of sovereign grace. Here the scriptures turn our attention away from our limited, personal experience, and toward the Sovereign One reigning in eternity.

The text brings clarity on this point: SALVATION flows from divine election.

"The verb elect means "to select, or choose out." The biblical doctrine of election is that before Creation God selected out of the human race, foreseen as fallen, those whom he would redeem, bring to faith, justify, and glorify in and through Jesus Christ... This divine choice is an expression of free and sovereign grace, for it is unconstrained and unconditional, not merited by anything in those who are its subjects. God owes sinners no mercy of any kind, only condemnation; so it is a wonder, and matter for endless praise, that he should choose to save any of us; and doubly so when his choice involved the giving of his own Son to suffer as sin-bearer for the elect."

- J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, p. 149

II. Why study Election?

It's biblically PERVASIVE (themes are constant in both Old and New Testaments).

It ELEVATES our view of God and His GRACE.

Some people today say that they are perplexed by the doctrine of God's sovereignty and election. I am amazed that anyone who believes in God should stumble at God's sovereignty and election. For if there is a God, a King, eternal, immortal, invisible, and almighty, He has to be sovereign, and He must do all things according to His will, and He must choose according to His purpose! Whom shall He consult?

With whom shall He seek counsel and advice? One may dislike these doctrines; but you cannot get rid of them without denying altogether the existence of the infinite, wise, glorious God of heaven and earth. God would not be God were He not absolutely sovereign in His eternal pre-arrangements and His present doings.

– Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

It guards us against PRIDE and self-reliance.

It shapes our view of the WORLD (particularly God's actions in it).

It fuels our WORSHIP.

“When [Paul] introduces [election] into his teaching, it is for one end only—to help Christians see how great is the grace that has saved them, and to move them to a worthy response in worship and life.”

- J.I. Packer, *God's Words*, p. 157

III. Some Important questions to answer regarding Election:

Are we elect to service or salvation? (Or both?)

Is election conditional or unconditional?

Does election follow faith, or does faith follow election?

Is election passive or active?

Is election corporate or individual? (or both?)

Is election single or double?

Does election impugn God's character?

Does election undermine holy living?

Does election obviate evangelism?

Preaching? Praying?

Is an election a doctrine we preach to the world or only to the church?

IV. Our Primary Presupposition

Our conclusions must be BIBLICAL (and therefore driven by the persistent teaching of the texts) rather than merely RATIONAL (driven by our reasoning and/or emotions, plus our limited capacity to understand).

Some secondary presuppositions:

- We yield to no individual or system for our interpretation.
- We recognize that perfect knowledge is impossible and (maybe even impermissible) when it comes to election.
- We accept that election is a secondary issue, not a primary one. Our view of election does not define us. Our view of the gospel does. Therefore, we will act in love and humility towards those whom we disagree.
- We can and should work together with those whom we disagree secondary issues as long as orthodoxy on primary issues is intact.
- Our aim is not to be philosophers analyzing and debating, but disciples loving and worshipping.

V. Election in Scripture

In the Old Testament ...

God chose Abraham and Israel.

God's plan was to bless the world through one man, Abraham. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham and promised him offspring land, and universal blessing. The choice of Abraham, however, was not because of his own goodness or virtue. Before Abraham was chosen, he was, as Paul says in Romans 4-5, ungodly. Josh 24:2 makes plain that Abraham and his family served other gods. The Lord chose Abraham because of his gracious love, despite Abraham's sin, and determined that Abraham and his offspring would become the channel through which the world would be blessed.

⁶“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

What is the operative cause of God's choice? HIS LOVE!

God chose priests and prophets.

Not only did God choose the forefathers of the nation... Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He also chose some for certain ministries and tasks. For instance, the Lord chose Aaron and his offspring to serve him as high priest.

In addition to the priesthood, God also chose prophets as messengers of the covenant.

In both scenarios, God's choice was his own. Isaiah is calling is described in Isaiah chapter 6 and in chapter 49 verse 1 we read about the Lord's choosing him before he was born: “The Lord called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother's womb.” The same was true of the prophet Jeremiah. In his youth and reluctance to serve, God reassured him With these words: “I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer. 1:5)

God chose kings.

It was the Lord's sovereign choice who would rule over Israel. The Lord chose Saul as king (1 Sam 10:24), but later rejected him for his disobedience (15:23). The Lord sovereignly and wisely chose David as the next king, even when Samuel thought surely it would be one of his other brothers (16:6). The Lord sovereignly chose David to be the means through which he would bless the nations. He made a covenant with David that would be everlasting and never withdrawn. (2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17; Psa 2, 72, 89, 132)

God chose Jerusalem and the location of his temple.

The scripture repeatedly emphasizes the Lord's specific choosing of Jerusalem. (1 Kings 8:44, 48; 11:13, 32, 36; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:27; 2 Chron 6:6, 38; Zech 1:17, 3:2).

Israel was designated “The city the Lord had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put his name.” (2 Chron 12:23; Zech 1:17; 3:2)

In the New Testament ...

Jesus chose the apostles.

The choosing of the 12 was one of the most important decisions in Jesus' life. As was true for the prophets, one didn't volunteer to serve as an apostle. Jesus asked, *"Didn't I choose you, the twelve?" (John 6:70).*

God chooses a people for salvation.

Not only does God choose people for special tasks or ministries, He also chooses them for salvation. The salvation of those in the Church of Jesus can be traced back to election, God's choice of his people.

In Matthew ...

At the end of the parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus concludes, *"Many are invited, but few are chosen."* (Matt 22:14).

²⁵At that time Jesus declared, *"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* (Matt 11:25-27)

Matthew also teaches the irrevocability of election. Jesus predicted a day in which *"false Messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, even the elect."* (Matt 24:24)

In John ...

John's Gospel paints 2 pictures of God's election of people for salvation:

1) The Father GIVES people to the Son. (John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 6, 9-10, 24)

³⁵Jesus said to them, *"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."* (John 6:35-40)

This 'giving' portrays election. All the Father gives to Jesus will believe in him. Here we learn that election PRECEDES faith.

2) God's people have an identity PRIOR to their faith in Jesus Christ.

"... you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one." (John 10:26-30)

Jesus could have said, "You are not my sheep because you don't believe", and of course this is true. But instead, he said, "You don't believe because you're not of my sheep". The sheep and the goats were identifiable *before* they believed or rejected Jesus.

In Acts ...

Paul's first missionary journey was a challenging one. Their gospel efforts resulted in much persecution. And yet, God was accomplishing His purposes:

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

On Paul's second missionary journey, he had a very discouraging start in Corinth. He had preached to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ, but they opposed him. In protest, he decides to go to the Gentiles. One night the Lord appeared to him in a vision to encourage and strengthen him. He tells him to keep preaching and he promises to be with him and to protect him:

⁴⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." (Acts 18:9-10)

In Paul's Epistles ...

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2 Thess 2:13)

... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will ... (Eph 1:4-5)

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will ... (Eph 1:11)

²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:27-31)

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. (1 Thess 1:4-5a)

Romans 9-11

1. God is sovereign meaning that He alone has the right to CHOOSE. His purposes are just, eternal and often unknowable. (i.e. inscrutable)
2. All people are LOST apart from Christ. (Therefore, none are deserving of salvation. The background of this doctrine of election is a people who had willingly forsaken God and had thus lost all rights and claims to his mercy. Hence, we cannot blame God for our *lostness*.)
3. All who are saved are recipients of MERCY (which is undeserved).
4. God's election *alone* does not guarantee the salvation of those elect for it. There must be an accompanying ACCEPTANCE of that offer of salvation. (Thus, our responsibility to accept God's salvation thru Jesus Christ remains intact.)
5. God CHOOSES and we must RESPOND.

In the General Epistles ...

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles ... (1 Peter 1:1)

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” ⁸and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. ⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:7-9)

In Revelation ...

⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. (Rev. 13:8)

¹²And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” (Rev 17:12-14)

VI. A Theological Framework:

1. Election is a recurring theme of Old and New Testaments alike.
2. Election is rooted in GOD’S LOVE.
3. Election is about God’s GLORY.
4. Election is the expression of God’s GRACE; it is not a matter of justice, it is pure mercy.
5. Election is a work of God determined before TIME.
6. Election is entirely of God without CONDITIONS.
7. Election is God’s work to REDEEM lost man; not God’s work to CONDEMN lost man.
8. Election connects the MEANS and the ENDS, and therefore includes PRAYER and PROCLAMATION.
9. Election affirms God’s SOVEREIGNTY without denying man’s RESPONSIBILITY.
10. We are not saved because we are elect. We are saved because we responded to the good news of Jesus Christ with FAITH.

VII. Conclusions

The glorious doctrine of our salvation, including election, is a cause for joy and celebration, not consternation. Rightly understood, it should produce good fruit in us, like ...

Humility.

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

Gratitude.

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thess 2:13-17)

Assurance.

¹ Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began ... (Titus 1:1-2)

Perseverance.

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began ... (2 Tim 1:8-9)

¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2 Tim 2:10)

Obedience.

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Confidence.

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth ... ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." ⁷ And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:1,4-11)

And remember:

"I cannot expect to understand the mysteries of God, neither do I wish to do so. If I understood God, he could not be the true God. A doctrine which I cannot fully grasp is a truth of God which is intended to grasp me. When I cannot climb, I kneel. Where I cannot build an observatory, I set up an altar. How idle it is to dream of our ever running parallel in understanding with the infinite God. His knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is so high we cannot attain to it."

- Charles Spurgeon

NOTES: