

The Grace of God in Election by Rev. Tom Aicken

Why is it that so many people (including many professing Christians) object to the biblical teaching of election, of predestination, of God foreordaining some to eternal life and appointing others to perdition? There may be countless reasons for that, but there are three in particular which stand out and demand special attention.

The first reason is that man begins with too high a view of himself. He sees himself as a creature made in the image of God, someone who has the potential to have fellowship with his Creator, and so he mistakenly thinks that his ultimate destiny should be left to him. The problem with this view is that it does not go back far enough. Man did not begin his journey as an image-bearer of God, but as dust (Genesis 2:7). He was dug up from the ground (Isaiah 51:1,2). “Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour?” (See Romans 9:19-21.) If we see that principle in everyday life, why would we not acknowledge it as the right of our Creator going back to the beginning of time?

Let us not forget that the federal head of the human race, Adam, fell into sin. He did so freely and of his own accord, which, in turn, rendered him and his posterity dead in sin and unresponsive to the call of God (Ephesians 2:1-3). Is it not then the Lord’s sovereign prerogative to rescue whom He will and to pass over the rest (Romans 9:14-18), and is it not the great wonder and most humbling feature of His character that He would save any of us at all?

In Ephesians 1:3-6 we are called to praise God for His having blessed His people, not now having blessed them with any material benefits they may have right here on earth, but with every spiritual blessing which is theirs in the heavenly places, and the first of these blessings listed (the engine that pulls the entire train of other benefits to follow) is God’s electing love.

Please observe the seven things we are told about it in this passage: (1) It is an election of individuals. V.4, “just as He (God) chose us ...” Paul is here writing to and about believers, all those who have a true and saving

interest in Christ. The question therefore that we need to ask is, 'Am I of the elect?' Responsibility rests on our own shoulders to make our calling and our election sure (2 Peter 1:10), and the only way that we can have such assurance is by our actively loving the Lord our God and His Son whom He has sent (Deuteronomy 6:5; John 17:3).

(2) It is an election in Christ. V.4, "just as He chose us in Him (in Christ) ..." Totally depraved and utterly unable to help ourselves, either we are rescued by someone who is in a position to do that, or we are hopelessly lost and subject to eternal condemnation. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who can deliver us from such a judgment (Acts 4:12; Hebrews 7:25).

(3) It is an election from eternity. V.4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ..." This shows that we were chosen, beloved, before we had done any good or evil. It also shows that we were chosen in His electing love, not because we were loveable, nor for any reason found in us (either now or in the future), but for whatever reason in God's secret counsel found only in Himself (Deuteronomy 7:6-8).

(4) It is an election to holiness - not merely to escape judgment, but to holiness. V.4, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him." Do you see any evidence of God's work in your own life to make you holy? If so, believer, it does not matter how imperfect it still is. He who has begun such a work in you will yet complete it (Philippians 1:6).

(5) It is an election to the dignity of becoming God's children and heirs. V.5, "In love He predestined us to the adoption as sons by Christ Jesus to Himself ..." This was not an arbitrary act on His part but was done in love, by a fatherly love that will never let us go, and such love demands predestination (John 6:37, 44, 65).

(6) It is an election founded on the good will and holy purpose of God. V.5, "according to the good pleasure of His will ..." It springs from God, take note, and, if it was not clear before, let it be so now, that it is consistent with His perfect righteousness.

(7) It is an election which has as its ultimate goal the glory of God. It is, v.6, "to the praise of the glory of His grace." Let us not object to it,

therefore, or look for reasons to reject it, but encourage one another as believers with regard to God's electing love, and let us rejoice in it to His endless praise!

Secondly, another reason that so many object to this teaching of election is that, when man becomes a bearer of God's image, he thinks it means that the creature's expressed desire for his own destiny and the way to achieve it can just be ignored, as if what he thinks and how he lives is irrelevant. Nothing could be further from the truth. God does not make anyone a new creation in Christ without at the same time drawing him, making him willing and eager to come to Christ and to commit everything to Him (Psalm 110:3; Philippians 2:13). Loving the Lord really does become the believer's choice.

When the Lord God calls out to sinners, "Look to Me, and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22), do we really think that He is snatching those who are foreordained to life whether they look to Him or not? Do we suppose that He is plucking as brands from the burning even those who continue to harbour iniquity against Him? If we do imagine that to be so, how could we possibly explain Numbers 21:4-9 or John 3:14,15? Clearly, only those who are given a desire for Christ come willingly to Him, but the point is that they do come, willingly and cheerfully, and that none of all who so receive Him shall ever be lost.

At the same time, all those who remain adamant in their opposition to Christ are rejected by Him, and it is on account of that opposition (their enmity toward God and determination to continue in sin) that they are turned away (Ezekiel 18:23; Matthew 23:37,38). The sovereignty of God in these matters does not erase or in any way diminish the responsibility of man.

There is no other conclusion that the Scriptures allow us to draw from all this than what they repeatedly reveal, namely, that, if anyone comes to Christ, he has been so drawn and made willing in a day of God's power to do so - to God be the glory for His overwhelming and uncompromising grace! - and that, if someone else continues in his sin, even against every invitation of the gospel being freely and sincerely offered to him, he has no one to blame but himself. It is God's grace that saves, in other words

- salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone - whereas it is man's sin that condemns. It may be said that God appoints men to perdition, but that same thing may also be stated in another way, that He hands them over to their own vile affections when their cup of iniquity is full and allows them to go their own chosen way. Either way, since men are lovers of sin by nature, it guarantees the same result.

Thirdly, one more reason that so many object to election, something in addition to the reasons of its perceived offensiveness mentioned above, is that the unbeliever commonly considers it an unwelcome and unnecessary challenge to think about death and what happens beyond the grave. This may seem strange to some, especially to the Christian - even if the unbeliever entertains the notion of annihilation, will he not first talk it over with others? - if he thinks he is going to a worse place, will he not try to investigate to see if he can improve his lot? - if he thinks he is going to a better place, the presumption of countless others, will he not do anything to verify such a wish? - we are told, though, why this is.

“But even if our gospel is veiled,” writes Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:4,5, “it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age (Satan) has blinded, who do not believe lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” People will plan their upcoming vacations meticulously, yet, when it comes to this most important excursion of all, they give no thought to where they may be going when they die. It is because the devil has blinded them, does not want them to think anything about it lest they should see Christ in the gospel, be called, convicted and converted.

If you are an unbeliever, it is a matter of the greatest urgency - so make it your top priority - to place yourself under the faithful preaching of the Word of God and to study the Bible carefully. The devil may confront you with this question, as he did Eve, “Has God indeed said ...?” in an attempt to make you stumble, but continue to sit under the counsel of God. The message of the cross of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (1 Corinthians 1:18-24).

If you come to believe, as so many have all around the world, and in every generation from the beginning of time, it is the direct result of God's electing love, of His having chosen you in Christ from before the

foundation of the world, of His offering up His own Son on the cross to pay the penalty of your sins, and of His keeping you through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit throughout all your days. O come to the Saviour, unbeliever, and make no delay! If you do not come to Christ, it is the result of your still being blinded by Satan and of your choosing to believe him rather than God. The state of your heart on your deathbed will tell the whole story.