

Essentials of the Faith Lesson 3

God's Sovereignty in Salvation: "Who Chose Whom?"

I. INTRODUCTION

a. Election--The Unmerited Selection by God.

- i. Election: the sovereign act of God by which, before creation of the universe, he chose in Christ those whom he graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies, not due to any foreknowledge of their merit (since all are congenitally depraved and thus possess no merit), but because of his own grace, mercy, and love (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

b. God's sovereignty in salvation must be understood in the context of:

- i. God's comprehensive sovereignty (EOF Lesson 1).

1. Is there anything over which God is not sovereign?

Psalm 103:19 The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all.

Psalm 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Isaiah 46:9-10 "Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me,¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'

- ii. The depraved condition of humanity (EOF Lesson 2): Recall the human condition:

1. The natural human condition is "totally depraved." Depraved: the condition of humanity which is inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no ability to enable him to recover himself, man is hopelessly condemned.

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Job 14:4 "Who can make the clean out of the unclean? No one!"

We do not become sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are born sinners. We sin because it is our nature to do so.

Our condition: Congenitally depraved (All humanity, at birth, is capable of any and every sin).

c. Now, humanity is in an interesting situation:

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- i. In this sense, understanding depravity, what can we say about humanity's ability to have "free will"? Is our will free, in the sense that we can please God or not please him? (There are other considerations when discussing free will, but only thinking of it in these terms).
 - 1. No. We can only be sinful, and therefore, only sin.
 - 2. However, can we do whatever we want? If you define "want" as that which is accord with our nature, then yes, we do whatever we want. But, what do we "want" as unbelievers? To sin. So, we do whatever we want, that is, we only sin, b/c we only want to sin.
- ii. So then, I want to encourage us to not use the term "free will" for a few reasons:
 - 1. It is a man-centered, and godless term. It assumes that man operates autonomously in this universe, w/o bounds, w/o restrictions, w/o constraint, w/o influence on anything we do.
 - 2. But we do not operate w/o restraint – we are very restricted, physically, for example. You cannot "do anything you want" – if you mean, any physical act you could conceive. You cannot jump from here to the next galaxy. You cannot jump from the peak of the Grand to Teewinot and then back to the Grand. You get the idea.
 - 3. Also, the term is contrary to what we learned in our 1st lesson on the sovereignty of God. If you affirm that God is sovereign, and you must, then you cannot simultaneously affirm free will. It borders on saying, man is sovereign, or, man is outside of God's sovereignty.
 - 4. But we saw that, Prov 21:1 for example, The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes. This makes free will impossible.
 - 5. This is not to say that we do not have a will. We certainly do. But it is not free as we have explained. More on this in later lessons.
 - 6. As we've seen from last week's study, a depraved condition of humanity means that we, apart from Christ, we are not able to not sin and our will is w/o exception sinful. In other words, we are unable to please God and we are unwilling to please God.
- iii. If there are "none who seek for God" (Rom 3:11), unwilling and unable to please, choose, love, or seek God-we are totally depraved- how can any person respond to

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God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? How does a dead person respond to something?

1. A few possibilities: 1) No one ever comes to faith in Jesus Christ. They are left to their depraved condition. 2) Some come to faith in Jesus Christ, b/c they are not left to their depraved condition.
2. And what God's word teaches w/ great clarity and glory is the latter:
3. Some, though totally depraved – unwilling and unable to seek and please God – come to faith in Jesus Christ, and are made able to please and love God.
4. Now, another condition arises. If that is true, and if depravity is our condition, the only way individuals can be rescued from hell is this:
 - a. God must sovereignly choose, or determine, those who are rescued from condemnation by faith in Christ (this week's lesson).
 - b. God must sovereignly call (effectual grace – Lesson 5).
- d. Thesis of the lesson: God must sovereignly choose, or determine, those who are rescued from condemnation by faith in Christ, otherwise, all are left in depravity and justly enter eternal punishment.
 - i. The term "God must" does not mean God is under some outside obligation. God is not obligated to do anything but uphold his justice, which means punish sinful people. Must means, if they are to be saved, the way it will happen is God must determine/choose.

II. BIBLICAL TEACHING

- a. The sovereign choice of God's people to salvation is a major theme in Scripture and, thus, must be one in our lives.
- b. Ephesians 1:3-6

Ephesians 1:3-6 ³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Ephesians is about the position and practice of the church; in other words – who are Christians – from God's perspective, and therefore ours. What is their identity?

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- i. What has and is happening such that people living in sin are converted to Christ and so become Christians? Eph 1:3-14 is concerned w/ answering the question – how do depraved people get saved?
- ii. From v. 3, who is blessed?
 1. God the Father and us
- iii. Who are the "us" here?
 1. "Saints"-Believers in Christ
- iv. So, based on v. 3, what will the rest of the passage is going to explain?
 1. In what ways God has blessed "us,"/we are blessed, w/ every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
 2. What it means to be blessed – from heaven's perspective
- v. V. 4a – what's the way he has blessed us here?
 1. Chosen
 2. 1:4 ἐξελέξατο. Aorist middle indicative from ἐκλέγομαι, meaning, "I pick out, I choose" (Abbot-Smith, p. 139). This verb occurs 22 times in the NT, five of which, in the aorist middle, refer to God selecting people for salvation (John 15:16, 19, Mark 13:20, Acts 1:2, Ephesians 1:4).
 3. The verb "chose" (aorist middle) indicates that God performed the choosing for himself and by himself; it was an independent choice; an active, willful choice on the part of the subject, independent and unconditional of the object of choice.
 4. "in Him" – in union with Him (Christ); in relationship with; united to.
- vi. When did he choose?
 1. "Before the foundation of the world"
 2. "laying down," "casting down," or "foundation" (TDNT, vol. 3, p. 620; Abbott-Smith, p. 232). On ten of the eleven occasions καταβολῆς is used in the NT (except in Hebrews 11:11), κόσμου follows directly after, indicating the throwing down or foundation of the world.
- vii. Why did he chose?
 1. To make the "us" something-Holy and blameless
 2. What is that talking about? – for salvation. So then, what is one reason a person is chosen by God and saved? Holy and blameless
- viii. Let's keep going – v. 5 – what is another way God says his people are blessed?
 1. He predestined us to adoption as sons
 2. What does "predestine" mean?
 - a. A compound verb: "limit," "set the limit," "fix," or "appoint" (TDNT, vol. 5, p. 452). Thus, the compound verb is rendered "foreordain," or

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"predestinate" (TDNT, vol. 5, p. 456). To "predestine" reemphasizes God's independent, unconditional choice

- ix. Why did he choose? (vv. 5-6)
 - 1. "In love"
 - 2. According to the kind intention of his will
 - 3. To the praise of his glory of his grace
 - x. How was this grace given? (v. 6)
 - 1. 'freely bestowed' on us in the Beloved.
 - 2. Recall, grace means "receiving blessing/benefit that we have not earned and when we deserve the opposite."
 - xi. The "us" here – how did they get such a privileged and blessed state? What did they do to get chosen?
 - 1. Nothing. The world wasn't even created yet.
 - xii. What motivated God to bless "us" as explained in vv. 4-6?
 - 1. His kindness – v. 5b
 - 2. His grace – v. 6
 - 3. His will – v. 6
 - xiii. Summary: Before God created the universe, he selected all who would be saved, independent of all outside influence, because of his grace and for his glory.
- c. Romans 8:29-30
- Romans 8:29-30 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.
- i. "Foreknew" – more than "knowing a fact before it happens," but "active involvement in determining that fact."
 - ii. Same word as in Eph 1:5 - "foreordain," "predestinate," "determine beforehand." God's independent, unconditional choice.
 - iii. The finality and certainty of those chosen for salvation is emphasized from eternity past to eternity future: those who are predestined for salvation are as good as having experienced conversion to salvation ("called"), are as good as having trusted in Christ and so declared righteous ("justified"), are as good as having experienced progressive christlikeness by the Holy Spirit ("conformed to the image of his Son"), and are as good as in heaven ("glorified").

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- iv. What solidifies the entire salvation event is the sovereign decision of God in eternity past to predestine the individual.
 - v. Summary: Because God has predestined the elect, the whole package of salvation (conversion, justification, sanctification, glorification) is certain and unalterable in the scheme of time.
- d. Election is expressed with several different Greek words in the NT
- i. ἐκλέγομαι (*eklegomai*) (used about 45 times of divine choosing)
 - 1. Eph 1:4 He chose us in Him before ...
 - 2. 1 Pet 1:1-2 "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge...
 - 3. Col 3:12 "as those who have been chosen of God..."
 - 4. 1 Thess 1:4 "knowing, brethren beloved of God, His choice of you..."
 - 5. Titus 1:1 "for the faith of those chosen of God..."
 - ii. αἰρέομαι (*haireomai*) -- idea of to lift out for oneself, to pick (as fruit)
 - 1. 2 Thess 2:13 "because from the beginning God chose you..."
 - iii. προχειρίζομαι (*procheirizomai*) -- choose for oneself, select, appoint
 - 1. Acts 3:20 "He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you"
 - 2. Acts 22:14 "The God ... has appointed you to know His will"
 - iv. προχειροτονέω (*procheirotoneo*) -- to extend the hand, choose, appoint beforehand
 - 1. Acts 10:41 Jesus appeared "to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God," ie. the disciples
 - v. τάσσω (*tasso*)
 - 1. Acts 13:48 "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed"
 - vi. προορίζω (*proorizo*)-- to mark out beforehand
 - 1. Eph 1:5 "in love He predestined [or foreordained] us to adoption..."
 - 2. Eph 1:11 "having been predestined according to His purpose..."

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- vii. προγινώσκω (proginosko) -- to foreknow or to know beforehand
 1. 1 Pet 1:1-2 "To those who reside as aliens, ... who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."
 2. Acts 2:23 this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.
 3. 1 Pet 1:20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you
- viii. Προετοιμάζω (pro-etoimadzo) -- to prepare before, make ready beforehand
 1. Rom 9:23 "vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called..."

III. OBSERVATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- a. It is not foreknowledge of obedience but unto obedience/in order that you may obey Jesus (i.e. Eph 1:4 "just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him..."
- b. Makes it impossible to define foreknowledge as merely foresight.
- c. Other passages are also instructive in gathering data on election and on trying to understand it and explain it.
 - i. Jhn 10:26-28 "you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them..." Note: Linked with security. (Jhn 6:37, 39, 44-45, 65, and note also v. 40 and v. 47).
 - ii. Acts 16:14 "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken..."
 - iii. 1 Cor 1:30 "but by His doing you are in Christ Jesus..."
 - iv. 1 Cor 8:23 "If anyone loves God, this one has been known by Him"
 - v. Gal 4:9 "come to know God, or rather having been known by God"
 - vi. Jas 1:18 "in the exercise of His will...brought us forth by the word of truth..."
 - vii. Matt 11:28 "Come unto Me, all you who are weary" but note the context:
 1. Matthew 11:25-27 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26 "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.
- viii. Jude 1 "the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus"
- ix. 2 Pet 1:10 "be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling..."

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- x. Jhn 1:12-13 "born again of the will of God"
- xi. Rev 13:8 names not written from foundation of world in book of life of Lamb

d. On the basis of the above data, election is, therefore,

- i. that which took place in eternity past
- ii. that which is the act of a sovereign Lord
- iii. that which occurs according to His perfect will
- iv. that which relates to His own glory and good pleasure
- v. that which is not conditioned in anyway by humanity or their merit (of which they have none)
- vi. that which reflects the mercy, grace and 'justness' of God
- vii. that which is especially done "in/through Christ"
- viii. that which embodies a specific present-day purpose
- ix. that which is the cause of thanks for believers

e. The inexplicability factor

- i. One element remains totally outside our comprehension, notwithstanding the biblical data available: On what is election based?
- ii. (1) Based purely on God's "omnipotent omniscience," His foresight? No.
 - 1. Because if election is seen as dependent upon foreseen faith then it is no longer a divine choice but merely a ratification of a human decision--the initiative is then primarily with man, not with God.
 - 2. But we really cannot leave it there because if sin has had the impact it has had on man so that none are free of condemnation and none can please God and none seek after God, then: election is the only way sinners are saved.
 - 3. AND if "foreknowledge" is defined as "foresight" or "advance knowledge based upon omniscience," then another question has to be immediately asked: From where does that foreseen faith come?
 - a. God sovereignly chose those who would be saved in eternity past such that, at the appointed time, they repent and believe (see Lesson 5).
- iii. (2) Based purely on God's own purpose and good pleasure? Yes.
 - 1. But this, while true to the biblical data, still leaves out the big WHY.

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2. It is purely an act of God's sovereign grace and cause for his people to respond in humble praise and admiration.

f. Election and responsibility

Jesus:

Jhn 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

Jhn 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Jhn 6:47 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

*While Christ affirms the truth of predestination, he simultaneously (and w/o hesitation) calls all to believe in him for eternal life. We, too, must do the same.

IV. OBJECTIONS AND PERCEIVED THREATS TO ELECTION

1. Threat No. 1: Election must remove human freedom and opportunity?

a. Response to Threat No. 1:

i. (1) Held men accountable for rejection/unbelief? Yes

1. Jhn 8:43-44 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

ii. Mt 23:37 note statement and answer

1. Mt 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

iii. Jhn 5:40 "and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

iv. Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

1. So (on Rom 1) as we saw last week in Rom 1, humanity is accountable to God, why?
 - a. He created us

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- b. General revelation – we know him

2. (2) Is God unjust for exclusion? No

- a. Rom 9:20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

- b. Closure to Threat No. 1:

- i. Nowhere does Scripture indicate that in order to be genuinely free and real our choices must be absolutely free from God's influence or control.
- ii. The consistent pattern observed is that people who remain in unbelief do so because they are themselves unwilling to come to God, and the blame for this lies with them not with God.
- iii. *This complaint (divine foreordination or election casts God in the role of an arbitrary despot indifferent to human choice) usually issues from Western secular humanists and atheistic existentialists who consider man himself and not God personally determinative and creative in regard to truth, morals, and human destiny; a God sovereign over human affairs they consider a threat to human freedom and responsibility [Henry, God, Rev. & Authority 6:79]*
- iv. IF you are saved you dare not take any credit to yourself.
- v. IF you are lost you are responsible [McClain]
 - 1. John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

V. TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

- a. These truths were not thought up in our day, but observed from Scripture since the beginning by God's people.
- b. Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 90): "It being the will of God that all his beloved ones should be made partakers of repentance, he has established them firmly by his own Almighty purpose."
- c. Augustine (A.D. 430): "Grace came into the world that those who were predestined before the world may be chosen out of the world."

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- d. Remigus (9th century): "Almighty God did, from the beginning, prior to the formation of the world, and before he had made any thing, predestinate some certain persons to glory, of his own gratuitous favor."
- e. John Huss (early 15th century): "Predestination does make a man a member of the universal Church... God wills that the predestinate shall have perpetual blessedness, and the reprobate to have eternal fire."
- f. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646, some 151 people):
 - i. (Chapter 3, God's Eternal Decree) III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.
 - ii. IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.
 - iii. V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.
 - iv. VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.
- g. Charles Spurgeon (1892): "Scripture continually speaks of God's people one by one and speaks of them as having been the special objects of election."
- h. How did believers throughout the centuries and millennia come to these same conclusions? They are reading the same Bible and indwelt by the same Spirit.

VI. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- a. Sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will

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result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

- b. The unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).
- c. Ezekiel 18:30-32, 33:11

³⁰ "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you." ³¹ "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."

Ezekiel 33:11 ¹¹ "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"

- d. The question, "Why did God not choose others?" is flawed. It presupposes that God ought to have chosen others, perhaps, because others deserved to be chosen. Instead, we must ask, "Why did God choose any? Why did he choose me?"
 - i. "A merciful God delivers so many to the praise of the glory of his grace from deserved perdition. If he should deliver no one there-from, he would not be unrighteous. Let him who is delivered love his grace. Let him who is not delivered acknowledge his due. In remitting a debt, goodness is perceived; in requiring it, justice. Unrighteousness is never found with God." (Augustine, A.D. 430)
- e. There's nothing God could do to sinful men that would make Him unjust. There's nothing man could do to make himself just before a holy God. (Trevor Craigen)

VII. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- i. If God does not sovereignly choose those who will be saved prior to creation, how will any be saved, especially considering our totally depraved condition?
 - 1. None could be saved.
 - 2. Must deny totally depravity.
- ii. If God chooses those who will be saved, then doesn't that make our love for him robotic? As in, he forces us to love him?
 - 1. The gospel is not about us loving God, but God loving us. 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

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2. In our depraved condition, we are unwilling or incapable of loving God. Loving God is the greatest purpose of the creature. Therefore, election is a supreme expression of love to undeserving sinners so that we can realize our greatest purpose as human beings: loving God.
- iii. What are the implications of this doctrine on evangelism?
1. Makes evangelism urgent.
 2. We can rest in God's means for evangelism: preaching the gospel.
 3. We can rest in God's power for conversion: saving the elect.
- iv. If an individual must be elect to be saved, how can man have a responsibility to repent and worship God (if he is unwilling and unable)?
1. Our depraved condition does not release our duty to repent. For example, people intoxicated by alcohol or drugs are not absolved from their obligation to operate their vehicles in accordance with the law even though their condition incapacitates them from doing so.
 2. The true measure of our responsibility and guilt is not our own ability to obey God, but the perfection of God's moral law and his own holiness ("You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" Matt 5:48). (Wayne Grudem)