

BEFORE THE WORLD WAS MADE

Pt. 2 - The Impact of Election

TEXT: ROMANS 8:28-30 (ESV)



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Ask Your Questions:

Last week, as a follow up to some of the themes brought up in our recent series on Malachi, we began a short study on the weighty doctrine of election, focusing then mainly on defining what this doctrine states: *God, according to His sovereign will, chose before the foundation of the world who would believe in Christ Jesus and thus be undeservingly saved, and who would continue in their rebellion against Him and thus deservingly perish because of their sin. The identity of God's elect is known only to Him—but it is comprised of people from every tongue, tribe and people group.*

One of the challenges of taking up a doctrine like this from the pulpit is there will never be enough time to say all there is to say. I knew this going in. And as I heard from many of you, I was reminded again that the intervening grace of God to rescue His people from their sin raises lots of questions: How could God save some but not others? Or why, of all the people God could've saved, did He call you? Or if God is sovereign, why evangelize? Or if God predestined who'd be saved before the world was made, doesn't that make His people puppets? What about the will to choose? Don't we have to accept Jesus?

I want to give you some pastoral direction with regard to your questions here: **ask them!** As I've wrestled with election over the years (and continue to) I've found this doctrine isn't a flimsy conjecture that collapses under the weight of closer scrutiny. The reason election remains a faithful interpretation of Scripture—and why Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Owens, Tim Keller, John Piper, James Boice, Francis Schaefer, JI Packer, Jerry Bridges and RC Sproul, to name a few, embraced it—is because they asked questions in earnest and found the answers did not merely allow for the doctrine of election, but solidified it as the most plausible and Scripturally faithful explanation for how a person comes to faith.

So I'm giving you homework, and hopefully a little help in the supplement in your bulletins. Study this doctrine. Before we delve into the core of this morning's message on the impact of the doctrine of unconditional election, I want to take a short aside to give you 4 reasons why it's worth your time to study doctrine in general and the doctrine of election in particular.

1. Theological study will orient you to the historical and biblical discussions which have been going on for centuries, developing your understanding of what's at stake with certain doctrinal ideas. If you've ever come upon an issue or practice and wondered, "How could anyone believe that?" odds are there are weighty reasons which are likely tied to principles and convictions people have forfeited their lives over. Doctrinal study is humbling and good because it helps us find our own thinking in the context of the larger Biblical, historical discussion, curbing us from assuming five minutes is all we need to grasp a complex idea and commit to our viewpoint.

2. Studying doctrine will anchor your faith fast to the bedrock of truth. This is invaluable. Though it's a deeply emotional way of life and rich in how it develops the heart, the Christianity is not anchored in feelings but in immovable truths. And when faith is tested or emotions fail and you feel you're exposed on the sheer face of a high cliff, doctrinal understandings of who God is, who we are, how He loves us, saves us, keeps us, and works in our lives are like tempered steel spikes driven deep into its surface holding you secure.

3. Studying doctrine will sharpen your mind in general. Like any discipline, thinking is a skill to develop. Theology engages logic, reason, observation, textual analysis and application. Don't say, "I just can't track with all that heavy academic stuff." Theological study doesn't have to be heavily academic. There are loads of classics and more recent works that anyone with an 8th grade education could benefit from—even if you read five pages a day. (You'd finish most books in less than 2 months at that rate.) John Piper said theological study "gives fiber to otherwise flabby minds." The point is the more you read, the better you become at reading. The more you have a good honest think on something, the better a thinker you'll become.

4. Studying doctrines like election engage you in the careful work of examining whether or not you are getting your role and God's role reversed. This doctrine will bring you time and again back to ask who initiates and who responds, who is the sovereign and who is subject. It will test whether or not we, as the clay, are objecting to the potter's right to make of us what He will. It will confound you at times, only to remind you that there are things God has determined are for our good which we cannot fully explain any more than we can fully know the mind of God. Studying God and His word is humbling because it presents God as supreme while also revealing how we've tried to wrest that title from Him.

So ask your questions. Read your Bibles. Consider the writings of others who have applied themselves to rigorous study in order to provide helpful resources delving into the Biblical teaching, historical discussion and consequences of the ideas contained in and flowing from doctrine. This doctrine will not collapse under careful scrutiny—it will refract glory like a prism.

Let's move to a fifth reason—the impact of unconditional election. It's easy to get hung up on asking why God chooses some for salvation and not others. This is a great mystery. But though we can't know why God chooses whom He does, we do know what He calls His people for. And for that we'll go to one of the greatest texts on the purpose of God in salvation.

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Called According To His Purpose:

If you are a Christian here today, why? What is the purpose of salvation by grace through faith in Christ? To get into heaven? To stay out of hell? To gain the approval of your parents, teachers, friends? To be reunited with a loved one? There are, I believe, great benefits in following Christ's teachings. But when it comes to getting at why anyone would follow Christ, our text reveals something very significant—God has a purpose behind your faith which is greater than any reason you could come up with. Verse 28 lays it out, and 29-30 unpack it: “*God works all things together for the good of those who love Him.*” And who are those that love God? “*Those who are called according to His purpose.*” Saving faith and love for God is the result of His call. He calls, resulting in a relationship built on love and faith.

But why is anyone called? Vs. 29-30 explain we're called because God has purpose for our lives. God's purpose for your life is not based on your performance, not on your attractiveness to the world, not on your skills or anything else found in you. God's purpose for your life is rooted in His call alone. If you're called according to His purpose, there is purpose in His call to make you like your older brother. **This is the aim of election.**

Conformed to the Image of Christ:

Vs. 29 says those God foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son so He, Jesus, might be the first among many siblings. In other words, it was God's design that Jesus would be the elder brother in the family of God's children. Those children, Paul says, are those God foreknew. What is it to foreknow? Some might suggest it means God foreknows a choice a person will make to believe in Him. But if you look at the text here and other places where this expression is used ^(Phil 1:29, Eph 2:8-9, 2 Tim 2:24-26, Mt 16:17), this doesn't refer to the actions of a person, but the people themselves.

Consider a few other places where the Bible talks of God “knowing” someone. Gen 18:19, God says of Abraham, “*I have known him, so that he might command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord.*” What does this mean? Nearly every English translation renders the word “known” here “chose.” Or Matt 7:23; Jesus says to the hypocrite at judgment day, “*I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.*” Could this mean He was unaware of them? Aside from the fact that it's unthinkable He had no knowledge of the person's existence, the verse itself tells us He knew how they lived their lives—so He must've known them well. Or Gen 4:1, “*Now Adam knew Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.*”

John Stott said in many places throughout the Bible, “*Know' is used in a sense practically synonymous with love.*” Foreknowing is fore-loving. And in our text, what this means is God's election is rooted in His love manifested in a sovereign decree to take a people and keep them forever as His own. But why would He do this? If we're all sinners, why bother? The answer should cause us to fall in worship before God. Titus 1:1-3 says God saves us because He promised the salvation of His elect “*before the ages began.*” But to whom? If God made this promise before the ages began, it wasn't to us. We weren't here. And He wouldn't have made it to the angels, because they are not eternal, but created beings also. There is only one God the Father could have made this promise of salvation to—God the Son, Jesus Christ. And His word upholds this idea.

2 Tim 1:8-9 says God “*saved us and called us...because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*” See, before it was a promise to you or me, salvation was a promise from the Father to His Son when God promised to express His inscrutable love for His Son by giving Him a gift—a redeemed humanity, justified and glorified in and through the Son Himself. This remnant would be perfected in every way as a perfect reflection of Jesus, thus glorifying the Son. God meant for the salvation of man, above all, to glorify Jesus!

Here we take our text again. Because God is holy and doesn't permit anything unholy to stand in His presence, to accomplish the purpose of His call would require something more than a snap of the fingers or a turning away from the true condition of our hearts. Something must happen in us—a transformation. In vs. 29-30, we see the progression required—those he foreknew He also predestined. Those He predestined He called. Those He called He justified. Those He justified He also glorified. **This is the impact of election**, that God conforms us into the image of His Son. This act of God is taking you someplace.

Of these events, God's foreknowledge and predestination occurred before time began. Justification is what happens when a person trusts in Christ for their salvation—they are justified, or declared righteous in the sight of God as God accepts the finished work of Christ on the cross as the payment for their sin, and gives them His resurrection life so that death cannot touch them any more than it can touch Christ. All that awaits the living follower of Jesus is glorification—when we enter into His presence for all eternity and our sin nature is forever stripped from us conforming us “*to the image of His Son.*” (vs. 29) This, our text tells us, shall be completed in God's elect.

This is sobering to think about. The reason God would take an undeserving people through this process of redemption, promising to bring it to completion, and in fact to work everything together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, was so that we would be a crown of glory He Himself would place on the brow of His own Son—which we dare not forget was a process that involved people not unlike us placing on that same brow a crown of thorns. Amazing love! What sacrifice! The Son of God given for me! My debt He paid and my death He died that I might live!

His Call Is To Himself:

When God has elected to save a person, this is what He'll do. You can't thwart God. God's call is as John Piper said “*a call that creates what it commands.*” When God calls me to Himself though I am at the time spiritually dead, He bellows, “*Russ Ramsey, live!*” and on the basis of His word, I live. **This is the impact of election.** I don't choose to live, but neither can I stop the coming to life. I must live, and I must believe because the life in me originated at His command, predestined according to His foreknowledge of His electing me to eternal life.

As you consider there was nothing in you that merited His grace, may this humble you to the point of inexpressible joy and overflowing thankfulness when you find you cannot separate your thoughts of God from the thought of His unfathomable grace in choosing you. And though you can't know why you were chosen, may you overflow in thankfulness with a knowing sense of what you have been chosen **for**—to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light, to be eternally satisfied in Jesus Christ, to taste and see that He is good and He is God. His call is to Himself.