

# **ELECTION**

**Whose Choice?**

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***Election: Whose Choice?***

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## F O R E W O R D

For centuries theologians have debated the concept of God's sovereignty as it relates to the salvation of man. There have been great men of God on both sides of the debate. Many believers, assuming their understanding of Scripture to be less competent than that of the theological scholars, have stood back almost in fear, reasoning that since great scholars cannot agree on the issues, how could they ever hope to understand them? Others have boldly taken sides, thinking they clearly understood the issues, only to be viewed as naive by those who considered themselves more scholarly.

Keep in mind that God's plan for providing salvation for sinful man was originated by the omniscient God Himself. As His created beings, we can never hope to fully understand the complexities and seeming contradictions which confront our puny minds as we search the depths of this awesome subject. Anyone who thinks he has it all figured out with every piece neatly categorized in its place, does not begin to understand how much he does not yet understand.

On the other hand, God has told us much that we can understand about this fascinating area of study. At least two things are abundantly clear about this intriguing subject. First, God is totally sovereign in the affairs of our lives. Second, God holds man responsible for his decisions. The resolution of these complementary concepts is the basis of the debate on divine election.

May God use these pages to confront us with His greatness. May He also use them to bring to mind our responsibilities, remembering that "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us [begging others] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

# C H A P T E R   O N E

## *The Sovereignty of God*

One of the most foundational tenets in all of Scripture is the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. This doctrine makes everything else fit together. God's sovereignty is broad and inclusive. One area where God's sovereignty is evident to believers is in the salvation of human beings. This is called the doctrine of election. As various passages of the Scriptures are carefully examined, the sovereign work of God in selecting some for salvation becomes evident.

### *Scriptural Fact: God's Sovereignty*

In studying the doctrine of salvation, the sovereign work of God in bringing men to believe in Christ is clear. Some are drawn to Christ by the Father and some are not.

**Five-Point Calvinism.** This interpretation of Scripture is often referred to as Calvinism, a name used by the followers of John Calvin. Calvinism can be summarized by five points, commonly called the five points of Calvinism, which are easily remembered by the use of an acrostic on the word "TULIP":

- T: total depravity of man,
- U: unconditional election,
- L: limited atonement,
- I: irresistible grace, and
- P: perseverance of the saints.

This booklet will focus on the first two of the five points: total depravity and unconditional election.

First, consider the last two of the points. The “I” refers to irresistible grace which means that God works in grace in an irresistible way with those He has elected. All whom God has chosen He draws to Christ in an irresistible way. They cannot resist the grace of God in being drawn to Jesus Christ; they are the elect. The “P” refers to perseverance of the saints which describes the security of the believer. Once someone is truly saved, he is always saved and will persevere to the end. That is inherent in the doctrine of election.

**Four-Point Calvinism.** The “L” refers to limited atonement which marks the difference between five-point Calvinism and four-point Calvinism. A four-point Calvinist believes that limited atonement is not biblical. The concept of limited atonement is that Christ died only for those whom God chose. He did not die for every person in the world; He died only for the elect, those chosen by God. Rather than holding to the position of limited atonement, a four-point Calvinist believes in unlimited atonement, meaning Christ died for everyone in the whole world. “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2; see also John 6:51; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:14). Even though Christ’s death was satisfactory for the sins of the whole world, it is only applied to the elect.

No doctrine is more encouraging and comforting to believers than the sovereignty of God, which may explain why the Devil has brought such confusion and misunderstanding into this area. The foundational concept for understanding everything is that God is totally in control and there are no chance happenings anywhere at any time in the world. Everything, down to the minutest detail, is part of the pre-planned, foreordained plan of God. He has determined what is to happen, and that is a great encouragement to believers.

**Practical Application.** In practical application, it means a person cannot just by chance breathe the wrong air, get cancer and die. It may happen in the plan of God, but it will not be by chance. A child cannot just by mistake run out into the street and get hit by a car. It must be in the plan of God for that to happen. If it does happen, there is no need to lament, “Oh, if only it had been different.”

There is great assurance and comfort in knowing that God is in total control of every detail, every tragedy and every heartache. All of these things are under the control of a sovereign God who is working out His purposes. That is why believers can say, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). God is in total control in moving everything toward that end.

### ***Examples of God’s Sovereignty***

In the Book of Isaiah, several passages stress the sovereignty of God. To understand His sovereignty does not mean that one understands why He does everything, but it does mean it is possible to rest in the assurance that He has a purpose in everything. Everything He allows to come into a person’s life is there by design.

**Sins of Men and Nations.** In Isaiah 14, God says even the sinful acts of nations and people are included in His sovereign plan. “The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, ‘Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand’ ” (Isa. 14:24). In the context of this passage, God is saying that He has intended it to happen; He has planned it, and it is sure. There is a finality in God’s plan and program with the nation Israel. God will raise up the nation of Assyria as a punishing agent for Israel.

**Past and Future Events.** God also speaks of His sovereignty in Isaiah 46. “Remember this, and be assured; recall it to mind, you transgressors. 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” (vs. 8,9). What uniqueness does God reveal about Himself? He is sovereignly in control of everything. Isaiah continues in verse 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.’” God declares that He is the One who is in control of the future. Much of the Bible is prophetic. Every time God gives a prophecy, He has settled in concrete an event that will happen, even sinful events.

**The Role of Judas Iscariot.** The Old Testament prophesied that Judas Iscariot would betray Jesus Christ. Centuries before there was a Judas, centuries before Jesus Christ walked the earth, it was settled in the plan of God that Judas would betray Jesus Christ. “Even my

close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9; cf. John 13:18). It could not be altered. What if Judas had changed his mind? What if something had gone wrong? What if Judas had fallen down the steps leaving the upper room and broke his leg? Why are these suggestions ridiculous? When the plan of God was fixed, it was settled, and nothing can frustrate that plan. Prophecy is a revelation of the plan that God has established, and His plan cannot be changed.

In Isaiah 46:10 God says, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.” “All My good pleasure” is the foundation and basis for the purposes of God.

**Israel’s Destruction by Babylon.** God refers to the nation of Babylon in Isaiah 46:11: “Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, *surely* I will do it.” God gave this prophecy of Israel’s destruction by Babylon three hundred years before the Babylonian Empire even came into existence. God said, “I have planned it, *surely* I will do it” (v. 11). Could something have happened to keep Nebuchadnezzar out of the Middle East? Could he have decided to stay home saying he did not want to go out to that barren desert and fight anyway? No. What if someone had assassinated Nebuchadnezzar and he had never made it to Palestine? That would have been impossible because God planned it otherwise, and He is totally, completely, absolutely in control.

**Lightning Striking its Target.** God’s sovereignty is also demonstrated in Job 36:32: “He covers *His* hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark.” Lightning seems to go randomly across the sky, but Job says God directs every bolt of lightning to its mark. There is no random streak of lightning. All of those flashes of lightning are directed in the plan of God to the mark He has established for them. That is a very important concept to keep in mind. If a thunderstorm came up right now, it would be even more important. Why? Because it is important to know that if a bolt of lightning strikes me, God has it under control. It did not happen by accident. If such an event were just an unimportant factor outside the sovereignty of God, it could upset the course of events. However, this is not the case. What if two dominant world leaders were struck by lightning and killed today? That could be very significant from a worldly perspective, but whatever happens is controlled and

directed by God.

**David, Jeremiah and Daniel.** In Psalm 139 David says, “O Lord, Thou has searched me and known *me*. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up” (vs. 1,2). That prompts the question, Who cares? God does. He knows every detail. “Thou dost understand my thought from afar” (v. 2). God knows what you are thinking right now. He knows what you are thinking about your job, the business deal you have to make this week, or what is going on in sports on television. “Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou has enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me. *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is *too* high, I cannot attain to it” (vs. 3-6). As David thinks about this, it is as though his head is going to burst; he can not grasp it. It is beyond him that God is intimately acquainted with him.

David continues describing God’s knowledge of him: “Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there” (vs. 7,8). You cannot go anywhere to get away from God; that is the futility of trying to run from Him. Where could you go? He fills the earth, the universe, heaven and hell alike. David continues describing God’s knowledge of his future in Psalm 139:16: “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them.” David is saying that all of his days, and everything he would do were written down in God’s book even before David was conceived in the womb.

With all of that knowledge God had about David, one might think David must have been a fatalist. In reading the Psalms, however, it is clear that he was not. He was a man who prayed, who was moved to beseech God and to commit his life to Him. David often asked God to act on his behalf. Yet it is evident that God has determined the course of human events within the bounds of time.

Other Old Testament passages declare the same truth. Jeremiah said in chapter 1 that God called him from the womb to be a prophet. That was not a decision Jeremiah made. It was a decision God made while Jeremiah was in the womb. Isaiah 40 acknowledges the same fact.



Many other passages through the Old Testament have the same emphasis. In Daniel 4:17, 25, 34 and 35, Daniel makes the point that God does among men what He chooses. He is sovereignly working out His plan. God is absolutely, totally sovereign and in control of everything. He is doing everything for one purpose—for His glory. He is totally selfish in all that He does, and that selfishness is in the good sense. It is wrong for me to be selfish because I would take that which is God's and use it for myself. God says everything is to be done for His glory, and that is the reason why He does everything.

Several passages in the New Testament speak to the subject of God's sovereignty in election.

**John 6.** John chapter 6 is a passage in which the doctrine of election is very clear. John records in verse 29, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" The work of God referred to in this verse could be an indication that this is the one thing a person can do that is pleasing to God—believe in His Son. The statement "that you believe" is a purpose clause which states the purpose of God's work. In all of the work that God is doing, the purpose is that you might believe.

Jesus says in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Those who come to Christ are the ones whom the Father has given to Him. That indicates selective dividing. The Father has given some to Christ; all those He has given to Him will come to Him. It becomes clear that God has not given everyone to Christ because not everyone comes to Him; but everyone the Father has given to Christ comes to Him. There has been a selective determination made regarding certain ones coming to Christ for salvation.

Verse 39 continues the emphasis, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." In saying "of all that He has given Me I lose nothing," Christ is declaring that those the Father has given to Him will come to Him, and they are secure in Him. All those whom the Father has given to the Son are guaranteed ultimate glorification, the completion of their salvation.

It is the work of the Father to draw men to the Son. "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I


will raise him up on the last day” (v. 44). Therefore, it is clear that no one can come to the Son unless he is drawn by the Father. This again denotes a selection process. Evidently not everyone is drawn because not everyone is coming. That is the reason for the explanations that Jesus is giving. It is also the reason why so many rebel and reject salvation, because only those whom the Father draws will come.

In addition to the Father drawing men to salvation, He is also involved in teaching them. “It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Every one who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (v. 45). Before a person can come to Jesus Christ and believe in Him, it is essential that he hear and be taught by the Father. This again emphasizes that not everybody is taught by the Father, but those who are taught by the Father come to Christ.

Jesus explains why some do not come in verse 64, “ ‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.” The next verse clarifies this even further: “And He was saying, ‘For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father’ ” (v. 65). Obviously, there are two groups, those who come and those who do not come. Those who have been given the privilege by the Father of coming to Christ are the only ones who can come.

**Ephesians 1.** Ephesians 1 is another great chapter on election and predestination. This chapter tells why God is doing many of the things He is doing. Paul writes in verses 5 and 6, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” God predestines some to be adopted as sons so His glory and the majesty of His person might be praised. That is why He appointed some to His sonship.

That purpose continues in verse 12: “To the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.” Paul goes on to say that the Holy Spirit “is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s *own* possession, to the praise of His glory” (v. 14). God is doing everything, even salvation, so that He will be praised. God does not save sinners

primarily so they can spend eternity in heaven; He saves them primarily so He will be praised. By providing salvation, the majesty of His Person will be honored and exalted as it deserves to be. That does not mean that believers are not the beneficiaries of a great salvation; but the benefit of salvation is not its ultimate end. Salvation is part of the means to glorify God. God is doing everything for Himself. Other passages such as Philippians 2:11 and 2 Corinthians 4:15 speak to the same issue. Thus, the totally sovereign God is doing all things for one purpose—His own glory. 

If you are not careful, you may begin to bridle under this. The conflict comes because man likes to have a certain degree of sovereignty. People do not like to be told that God is totally in control and that He is doing everything for Himself. People are preoccupied with their own importance and desire to control, but Scripture is clear, God is totally sovereign with absolute control, and He is doing everything for Himself. That is His ultimate purpose and goal, and that is right. He alone is the One who is worthy of praise, glory and honor. The fact that people resist is simply an indication of their own sinfulness.

## C H A P T E R   T W O

### *The Need for Election*

#### *Man Is Totally Depraved*

The first major point that will be dealt with in detail is the sinfulness of man, also referred to as total depravity. This concept is foundational to understanding the doctrine of election. If the depravity of man is understood, the doctrine of election is simple to grasp.

**Depravity Defined.** Total depravity does not mean that everyone is as bad as he could possibly be in his actions, but total depravity means that man is as bad off as possible. Sin has pervaded everyone's life. The totality of a human being is affected and infected by sin. That does not mean that the manifestation of sin is as bad as it could be in every area, but it means a person is infected by sin in every area. It means there is nothing good or righteous in anyone.

**Relative Good.** There is a concept referred to as relative good. Within certain confines, people can do relative good, but this relative good cannot become ultimate good. In the Scripture, ultimate good is that which is done for the honor and glory of God. In the ultimate sense that is the only thing which is truly good.

Paul says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Does the unregenerate, unbelieving person ever do anything on the basis of faith in God relying upon Christ? Obviously not. If he did, he

would not be unregenerate. An unbeliever does not act out of faith in God and recognize who God is, what God has done, and what God's purposes are for him. An unbeliever cannot do anything good from God's perspective. The only thing that is good in God's eyes is that which is done in faith. So the unregenerate person can do no ultimate good.

As an example of relative good, you may be sick and find that your unsaved neighbor brings you dinner for the evening. That was relative good. His actions would be good within the confines of sinful activity, but he did not do it from a relationship of faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore it was only relative good. The sinner can do relative good, but he cannot do ultimate good. Only ultimate good is acceptable before the holy and sovereign God.

**God's Description of Humanity.** How does Scripture describe man's condition? Romans 3 is often quoted for this description. Most of chapter 3 is a series of quotes from the Old Testament, especially from the Psalms. It brings together in a concise way a description of the condition of humanity.

Paul writes in Romans 3:10, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." Notice the finality of that statement. This is not a statement of relative righteousness or good. It speaks of ultimate good from God's perspective. Paul continues the description in verses 11 and 12: "THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." Paul continues by describing in detail the character of the unbeliever from God's perspective. In Romans 3:23 he makes a sweeping statement: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This means all are separated from God. Romans 6:23 identifies the results: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In Ephesians 2:1-3, Paul describes man's condition as being dead in sin. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as

the rest.” That was man’s condition—totally absorbed in sin, obeying the dictates of the flesh and the Devil. Man is described as being dead; that means separated from God and having no relationship with Him. In this condition man is a slave to sin, living in the lusts of the flesh and indulging the desires of the flesh. By nature, men are children of wrath. In John 8:34 Jesus said, “Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin.”

### ***The Question of Free Will***

Acknowledging man’s slavery to sin is extremely important to the concept of the total depravity of man. People often have trouble reconciling these concepts with the idea of free will. Free will, as it is commonly thought of, is not a biblical concept—if by free will one thinks that man is free to do what he wants to do. Man is free in the sense that he is responsible and does make a choice, but man is not free because he is a slave to sin and always exercises his freedom to obey his master. That is why God says there is none that does good, there is none that seeks after Him. Each person uses his will to obey sin. Any time a person exercises his will, he exercises it in a negative way to obey and pursue sin. Therefore, man is not as free as he would like to think he is.

**True Freedom.** A person is free only when he can function in the context for which he was created. That is real freedom.

When Jesus Christ sets you free, you are free indeed. You were created for a relationship with God, and only by faith in Christ can you have that relationship. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, for the first time he is free. He is free to function in the relationship for which God created him. He has freedom for a personal relationship with the personal God who made him.

A person who thinks he is free to do whatever he wants to do is deceiving himself. He is really doing what the Devil wants him to do. He is under Satan’s domination and control. He is a slave to sin.

**All Are Condemned.** The unregenerate man, the one who has not been born again, has no ability to perceive and know the things of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” God is not dealing with innocent people. He is dealing

with people who are sinners by birth and sinners by choice. As a result of sin, sinners are under condemnation because the Bible says the penalty for sin is death—physical, spiritual and eternal death. Remember, God is not dealing with poor, innocent people. He is dealing with guilty, vile, condemned, rebellious sinners. This point may be difficult to accept, but it is important to understand.

God is dealing with humanity, and every person among humanity is sinful. The penalty for sin is death which includes eternity in hell. God would be totally fair if He sent every member of the human race to hell. God did send the angels who sinned to hell. Hebrews 2 indicates that God never provided any opportunity for the fallen angels to be forgiven. He simply sentenced every last one of them to hell with no chance to ever change His mind. God is not obligated to forgive. He is only obligated to be just. Justice demands that sinners go to hell. If God stopped at this point, He would be totally justified to send everyone to hell and no one to heaven.

**Some Will Be Saved.** When looking at the doctrine of election, it can be seen that from among fallen humanity God has sovereignly chosen to save some. Is it fair to save some and not to save all? It has already been established that it is fair if He condemns everyone. God is not obligated to save anyone, but He has sovereignly chosen to save some. The only issue is that He must do it in a way that is consistent with justice. Since all men are sinners deserving hell, God can not forget about the penalty. If He saves some, He must do it in a way consistent with His righteous character.

Everyone who truly believes the Bible, believes in election. The word election is used some 30 times in the New Testament, so it must be accepted. However, not all may believe in election in exactly the same way.

“Election” is a common word. In the United States, a new president is elected every four years. What does that mean? The voters select or choose a president. That is the meaning of election—to select, to choose or to pick out. In the biblical doctrine of election, God has selected certain ones to experience His salvation and spend eternity in heaven. Fairness or justice would dictate that *all* be condemned to an eternity in hell. Since all mankind deserves hell, God’s election of some to experience salvation is evidence of His mercy.

## C H A P T E R     T H R E E

### *The Basis for Election*

How did God select those He elected? Peter says God selects candidates for salvation on the basis of His foreknowledge. He says believers are those “who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:1,2). There are two basic possibilities for interpreting this passage.

#### ***Election Based on Knowing in Advance***

One interpretation is that in eternity past God looked down the corridor of time and saw a particular person. God watched that person, and he came to believe in Christ. Therefore, when God saw that he would believe in Christ, God chose him for Himself on that basis.

**Who Is In Control?** Those who agree with this interpretation have to explain who is really in control. If all God does is sit in the past and look into the future to see what will happen and then make that part of His plan, God is only a spectator. Knowing ahead of time what will happen is different from claiming credit for making the plan. In the Old Testament, God claimed credit for determining what would happen.

Who is in control of a believer’s salvation, God or the believer? If God looked ahead to see which people would choose Him, then the person is the one who determines who would choose Him. If God determined which people would choose Him, God is the One



who determines. It fits human nature if man can be the one who determines. People want to be the masters of their own destiny.

**God's Plan Is Still Set.** Even under this interpretation, man does not have free will. God's plan is set. If in eternity past God looked into the future and set His plan based on what He saw, it is still true that God's plan is set. If God selected me on that basis, it is still a settled fact that I am selected. That fact cannot change.

For example, if God looked into the future and saw that Judas Iscariot was going to betray Jesus Christ and then made that part of His plan, it was still a settled fact when Judas was born that he would betray Jesus Christ. Believing that God elected some based on what they would do does not eliminate God's plan. Whether you believe God's choice was based on something man did or not, the end result is the same and this approach does not make man free to do whatever he wants to do and then have God simply make adjustments to His plan.

### ***Election Based on Sovereign Determination***

The other interpretation of foreknowledge is that God sovereignly selected some for Himself, not on the basis of anything they would do. There are strong, Bible-believing Christians on both sides of this issue. This issue is not the watershed of the Christian faith.

**Definition of Foreknowledge.** Central to the discussion is the definition of foreknowledge. The meaning of foreknowledge which is most consistent with the teaching of the Word of God does not simply mean to know ahead of time, but rather to determine or to set ahead of time. The reason God can foreknow anything is because He has determined it to happen. When He has determined that something will happen, He knows it will happen. The reason for God's foreknowledge is that He has laid the plan.

Look at a simple illustration which may help clarify the point. If a person plans to go to lunch with his friend tomorrow at 11:30, he knows he is going to lunch with his friend tomorrow because he fore-planned it. He planned that it would happen, so he has knowledge ahead of time that it will happen. Obviously this illustration breaks down, but it helps to clarify the point.

First Peter 1:1,2 says that believers "are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God." The word translated "chosen" is the

word “elect.” In verse 20 of that same chapter, speaking about the death of Jesus Christ, Peter wrote, “For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world.” Would you say that God just looked down in time and saw that men would crucify His Son, so He incorporated it into His plan? If that were true, who is really responsible for salvation, God or man? If all God did was look ahead to see what man would do, then man was in control and man decided what would happen to God’s Son. That is not the idea conveyed in Isaiah 53 and related passages in the Old and New Testaments where God’s plan to send His Son is presented. Obviously, such an interpretation is not consistent with God’s sovereignty.

In Acts 2 the term foreknowledge is used dealing with the coming of Christ. In verse 22 Peter talks about the fact that Christ was attested with signs, wonders and miracles. Verse 23 says: “This man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.” The phrase “the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God” indicates that it is the predetermined plan which enables God to foreknow or to know ahead. There is a grammatical construction in this Greek phrase that is interpreted using Granville Sharp’s Rule of Grammar. That rule basically says that the two words in this construction refer to the same thing with different shades of the same idea. Therefore, the predetermined plan of God is basically the same thing as His foreknowledge. Man did what God predetermined and knew would happen. He knew what would happen because He predetermined that it would happen. Such an interpretation is fitting for verse 20 because Christ was predetermined before the foundation of the world to be the Lamb of God.

**Examples of God’s Foreknowledge.** God’s foreknowledge then is that which God has predetermined. He knows the future because He determined the future. In the New Testament foreknowledge is used of God in Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:2 and 20. In these passages foreknowledge is synonymous with God’s predetermined plan.

The word has a similar meaning in the Old Testament. It is used in Exodus 2 of God’s foreknowledge. “And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of* [literally, knew] *them*” (Ex. 2:25). God saw the sons of Israel and knew them.

*God Knew Israel.* God did not look down from heaven and say, "There are the sons of Israel; hey, I know them." That does not make sense. Of course He knew them. He knows everything. Omniscience is one of His attributes. Then what does this phrase mean? It means He selected them out; He put His favor upon them to choose them. He predetermined to use them and to have them for Himself. Therefore, when Moses writes, "God saw the sons of Israel and knew them," it means He chose them with favor. That meaning fits the context.

Consider another example of this concept in Amos 3. Speaking to the nation Israel, God says, "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth" (v.2). The King James Version translates it more literally, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." The Hebrew word is "to know." It is not that God did not know about Assyria, Egypt or Babylon, rather that He did, but God chose to put His favor on and chose for Himself, the only nation that He had determined would belong to Him. Israel is the only nation that He has chosen or known.

*God Chose Abraham.* Does the Old Testament present the idea that God looked down and saw that Abraham would become a believer and that his descendants would be a faithful people, that they would choose God as their God, and therefore, on that basis, God chose them? No. Exactly the opposite happened. Abraham was evidently an idol worshiper living in a pagan land. God arbitrarily reached down and took hold of Abraham and selected him out of idolatry. In Romans 11:2 Paul writes, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." God has put His favor upon Israel; they belong to Him. To say that God simply knew ahead of time what Israel would do does not fit at all. Israel did not choose God; God chose Israel. He takes credit for that choice repeatedly through the Old Testament. Yet if God had simply looked ahead to see what Israel would do, He could not have taken that credit. He would have simply been responding to them. The picture, however, is clear: God is in control.

*God's Sovereignty with Job.* In order to see something of the absolute sovereignty and greatness of God, read Isaiah 40 and the closing chapters of Job (chapters 38-42). Job was a righteous man according to God's own declaration, but through the experiences recorded in this book, Job grew in his appreciation of who God is.

Job challenged God. As he was brought under the tremendous pressures of suffering, he began questioning God, at least to inquire of God the reasons for his suffering.

God tells Job to wrap himself in his mantel, stand up and see just how great a person he really is. "Could you weigh out the mountains?" God asks Job. "Could you control all the details of nature? Could you create anything?" Obviously the answers are no. With Job's knowledge clearly limited, God asks Job why he thinks he has the privilege of questioning Him. After God's questions to Job in chapters 38 through 41, Job is all but devastated when he sees himself as God sees him. Job comes to the conclusion at the end of chapter 42 that God is greater than he had ever estimated Him to be.

Job's response is in the final chapter. "Then Job answered the Lord and said, 'I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask of You, and You instruct me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes' " (Job 42:1-6). When Job finally came to a proper perspective of the greatness of God and His total sovereignty and control over His creation, Job came to a proper perspective of himself and realized his attitude ought to be one of submissiveness as the learner rather than as the challenger.

It is necessary to be careful that one's attitude toward God is proper. You must recognize that He is the One who is totally sovereign and you are a created being with the goal to learn more of Him. You have no right to put Him on trial or to question what He does. Your responsibility is simply to learn from Him. What He does is right, and He has the right to do what He chooses.

If God is obligated to give an account to anyone, then to that extent He must be submissive to that person. If a person is obligated in his job to give an account to someone else, he is responsible to that person. God is accountable to no one but Himself. That means He is not obligated to answer anyone's questions. He has very graciously answered many of them, but when it comes to the basis for God's choice, He simply says, "I did it because I chose to do it. I am sovereign."

*God's Right to Choose.* In Ephesians 1 Paul wrote in verses 3-5: "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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." The last phrase is translated more accurately in the King James Version, "according to the good pleasure of His will." Verse 9 has the same emphasis: "He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention," literally, according to His good pleasure. He did that simply because it pleased Him to do it.

How far back did God make His choices? Verse 11 says, "Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." That is as far back as man can go. Scripture says no more. God counseled with Himself and decided to do it that way. What was His basis for electing some to salvation? Simply that it pleased Him to do it; and after counseling with Himself, He did it.

It is easy to be uncomfortable with that statement. Job experienced the same feelings. The more directly you are confronted with the greatness of God and the might of His person, the more you have to look at yourself in a proper perspective. People do not like to be told they are not in charge. They do not mind sharing sovereignty with God, but they chafe under His total sovereignty. He does everything according to what pleases Him, and He acts only on the counsel of His will. That makes Him totally sovereign and us totally subject to Him.

*God Chose Jacob.* In Romans 9 Paul describes the birth of twins to Isaac and Rebecca—Esau and Jacob. He writes in verse 11, "For though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice might stand [literally, according to election], not because of works, but because of Him who calls." Why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? So that His purpose according to election might stand. That does not answer every question one would like to have answered, but God is totally sovereign and decided to do it that way.

For example, parents have the option to make certain choices at their discretion. They decide to do something simply because it is

within their prerogative as parents to make that decision. If their children question them saying, "Why are you doing this?" the parents sometimes remind them that they are the parents, and they do not have to give them answers for all their decisions. Parents have the right to make those decisions within certain confines. Children do not have the right to put their parents on trial for the decisions they make.

If you expand that concept to God, His decisions and His sovereignty become clearer. Don't forget that He is absolutely and totally sovereign. He is not accountable to us. God simply decided to do it that way, and He is not obligated to tell us the reasons for His choice.

It is encouraging to remember that God always does the right thing. Just as children have to trust their parents because they do not understand all the decisions that are made, so we have to trust God because we don't understand all He is doing. Remember that God always does the right thing. He always does what is best and decides that in a way that is consistent with His own character.

## C H A P T E R     F O U R

### *The Rationale of Election*

#### ***The Time of Election***

Scripture indicates that God sovereignly chose some for salvation a long time ago: “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).

**Before the Foundation of the World.** The choice was made before the foundation of the world. That concept is important because some people think that by altering the definition of foreknowledge (that God chose on the basis of knowing ahead of time) it allows man a certain freedom today. However, Scripture is clear: the elect were chosen before the foundation of the world. Whatever the basis of God’s choice, it was made before He ever started creation in Genesis 1:1. He chose believers before the foundation of the world. We do not know how many thousands of years ago the world was created, but before that, He chose believers for salvation in Jesus Christ.

**From the Beginning.** In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul writes, “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” When did God choose believers? From the beginning. John 1:1 refers to the fact that in the beginning the Word was already in existence. Going back to the beginning in Genesis 1:1, we are reminded that some were already chosen for salvation at that point.

What if one of the elect dies before believing? The last phrase of 2 Thessalonians 2:13 indicates that God has not only ordained the end, salvation, but also the means—“through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” God chose some for salvation before He created the world. He determined that through the ministry of the Spirit in setting them apart, they would believe the truth and thus enter into salvation. It is not possible for one of the elect to die before believing. None of the elect could die before believing because God is totally sovereign, and in His sovereignty those He elects will believe. They are brought under the sound of the Gospel because “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). As they hear, the Spirit of God gives them understanding to cause them to believe that Jesus Christ died for them. God ordained the process from beginning to end in eternity past.

**From the Foundation of the World.** In the midst of some great prophetic material in Revelation 17, the Apostle John writes about things which occurred before the creation of the world. “And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 17:8). The emphasis in this verse and in Revelation 20:15 is on those whose names are *not* written in the Book of Life: “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (20:15).

All those whose names are in the Book of Life are going to spend eternity in God’s presence. Anyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire, which is hell. It is an awesome concept when one considers that those whose names are in the Book of Life were put there before the foundation of the world.

Regardless of the view one holds on election, God says that those who will believe already have their names written in the Book of Life. Any view of election must allow for Revelation 13:8 and 17:8. If you are unhappy with what God says He has done about election, it is an indication that there needs to be an adjustment made in your submission to Him and to His purposes.

### ***The Fairness of Election***

Is it fair that God chooses some for salvation and does not choose others? It seems as though God has determined that some



will have to go to hell without any chance of salvation. However, the point that must be remembered is that God is dealing with sinful human beings, and He is not obligated to save anyone. All He is obligated to do is to be just. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Christ] likewise also partook of the same" (Heb. 2:14). Those God was going to save were flesh and blood—humanity. Jesus Christ had to become a human being with flesh and blood to die for them and be their representative. Taking their place in dying on the cross for their sins was the only way that could God save them.

**No Salvation for Angels.** Note the contrast in Hebrews 2:16 and 17, "For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things." He had to be made like mankind in every way so He could be identified with mankind in His death. God gave no such hope to angels.

Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, who is known as Satan, rebelled against God. A host of angels followed him. That act of rebellion settled forever their destiny in hell. There is no provision of salvation for Satan or any of the fallen angels. For a fallen angel to have been saved, Jesus Christ would have had to become an angel and die in the place of angels, identifying with them so they could believe in Him and be saved. God made no such provision. Is that fair? Obviously it is fair because God did it. He is not obligated to save them; all He is obligated to do is to judge them for their sins.

**No Obligation to Save Man.** The situation is the same for human beings. They are sinners in rebellion against God, and God is not obligated to save any of them. As soon as it is pointed out that God has sovereignly chosen to save some, someone cries, "Not fair!" It is fair as long as those He saves are saved in a way consistent with His justice.

The question is not, "Can God be just in sending people to hell?" The real question is, "Can God be just in sending people to heaven?" Rightfully, sinful people should go to hell. That is the penalty for their sin. However, since all are sinners, how is God going to be just in taking anyone to heaven?

**Salvation Provided by Grace.** God's great provision is that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so that sinners might

believe in Him and experience His salvation. From fallen humanity—everyone—God has sovereignly chosen some for Himself.

What about those He did not choose? They are going to hell, which is consistent with the fact that they have chosen to be sinners. Is that fair? Even if I don't like it, I have to admit it is fair and just.

Regardless of your perspective on the sovereignty of God and the doctrine of election, we must all grapple with the same issue. God is omniscient. He knows everything from the beginning. He knew from before the creation that some people would not believe in Him and would go to hell. Why did He create them in the first place? Because He chose to create them; it suited Him to do it. No more answers are provided other than those included in the Scriptures. God recorded in Proverbs 16:4, "The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil." He did it this way because it suited Him. It will magnify and honor Him.

If we are not careful, we will begin to chafe against that. If we do chafe against God, that reveals just how sinful we really are—to the point of challenging God.

We must acknowledge that God is totally sovereign. Rebellious man does not like that. Man likes to think of himself as being the boss, or at least of having a share in the decisions. But the Judge of all the earth does right.

Remember God is not a capricious god acting out of hardness, but a God of love, kindness and mercy. Romans 11 speaks of God graciously choosing some for salvation: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (v. 5). Literally it says according to the election of grace. Even in Paul's day, there was an election of grace among the Jews in Israel. Paul continues, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (v. 6). Election has to be on the basis of grace. There can be no works involved. That was the point in Romans 9 with Jacob and Esau. Before they had done good or bad, God chose Jacob. If God had chosen them on the basis of what He saw they would do, He would have chosen them on the basis of good or bad. The point is that their works did not affect the choice. It was an election of grace.

A Christian's salvation can in no way be based on anything he

has done. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. By definition, grace is something unmerited or undeserved.

All of humanity is fallen. All are under condemnation. All are sinners rebelling against God. All are rejecting the salvation that God has provided. If God chose to send all of mankind to hell because they are sinners, He would be totally fair in doing so. However, He did not do this. God is a God of love and He chooses some to be recipients of His grace. Why didn't He select them all? No answers are revealed except that it was not His purpose to do it. The fact is that not everybody is saved. God could have saved everyone if He had chosen to, but He didn't.

It is easy to lose sight of what a glorious thing salvation is. Rebellious, sinful humanity says no to God and to His salvation. God lovingly decides to select out some for salvation. The amazing thing is that many are going to heaven. The emphasis of Scripture is that God has chosen to save some out of the mass of fallen humanity to experience His eternal salvation.

### ***God's Purposes in Election***

Why did God choose to do things this way? What were His purposes in election? Scripture reveals some answers.

**To Manifest the Glory of His Character.** The ultimate purpose of election, of course, is for the glory of God (see Proverbs 16:4). Paul gives one of God's purposes for election in Ephesians 1:4, "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him." According to this verse, God's purpose in choosing some for salvation was so there would be a group of humanity who would be holy and blameless. They will fulfill the purpose God has for creation in manifesting the glory of His character, holiness and blamelessness.

**To Demonstrate the Glory of His Grace.** A second purpose is seen in Ephesians 1:12: "To the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." That is why He predestined some—that they would be to the praise of His glory. The Book of Ephesians makes the point clear that for all eternity the elect will be trophies of grace for God. He is going to be able to demonstrate the greatness of His grace in eternity. The elect's presence in heaven is going to be an evidence of how great God's grace

really is. For all of eternity, those in heaven are going to be trophies to the greatness of the grace of God. Those in hell will be evidence of the greatness of God in His justice and holiness.

**To Proclaim the Excellencies of His Name.** Peter gives another purpose for election in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *GOD’S* OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” God has chosen some that they might proclaim His excellencies. That is why making Him known to people all around the world should be a priority. One of God’s specific purposes in choosing the elect is that His excellencies, the greatness of Him who called us out of darkness into light, might be proclaimed.

**To Bear Fruit That Will Remain.** Jesus gave another purpose for election in John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain.” He chose and appointed some to the task of being fruit-bearing Christians. He did not choose on the basis of what they would do, but He chose and appointed them to do something in His sovereign control. The elect were chosen to glorify Him.

## C H A P T E R     F I V E

### *Evangelism and Election*

Another aspect of the sovereignty of God relates to the subject of evangelism.

#### ***God's or Man's Responsibility***

**The responsibility to evangelize.** A different view on election often influences the way people evangelize. With a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God, they ask, "If God has elected certain ones to salvation, why should I evangelize?" The answer is very simple—because the sovereign God has commanded Christians to evangelize. Evangelism is the means to the end. The means is the hearing of the truth; the end is salvation.

In His efforts to present the Gospel, Paul said, "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). A believer's responsibility is to present the Gospel at every opportunity, praying that the Spirit will take the Gospel and apply it to the hearts of those God has elected causing them to believe. As Christians present the Gospel, they can keep in mind that there are some whose names are in the Book of Life and some whose names are not.

Remember that God is totally sovereign. He has such total, absolute control over all the details of life that the elect will believe. Nothing can happen to thwart that. It is so settled that God has

already put the names of the elect in the Book of Life. In a similar way, the messages preached by the Old Testament prophets confirm God's sovereignty. When they spoke about the future, they spoke of it in the past tense, which is referred to as the prophetic past. When God says something is going to happen, it is so settled that He can write about it as though it has already happened. God is confident about what is going to happen because He has determined and settled it.

**Concern for Family Members.** God lists in the Book of Life those whom He has elected because it is settled that they will hear the truth, believe it and spend eternity in the presence of God. Right away some may think: *What does this mean if my child's name is not in the Book of Life? What does it mean if my spouse's name is not in the Book of Life? It would mean they could not be saved; that is not fair.*

Remember, it is fair if God sends sinners to hell. It should be a comfort to know that the destiny of loved ones ultimately depends on God and not on you or me. A Christian has no need to lie awake at night wondering whether his children or spouse is elect. That question is in the hands of God. God has simply said to train children according to the truth of God, to pray for them and to present the Gospel to them. While it is natural to want loved ones to believe, Christians must recognize that ultimately this is in the hands of God. God always does the right thing. God could not make a choice that would be wrong. Believers try to take God's "responsibilities" on themselves. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25, KJV). Does that not mean He will do right with children, spouses and friends?

God challenged Job with that same concept. God asked Job if he could feed all the animals or take care of all of creation. Obviously Job could not. Then why was Job worrying about God's responsibilities?

The doctrine of election is a great comfort to believers as they share the Gospel, knowing that God is sovereignly in control. The destiny of the people with whom the Gospel is shared is in God's hands. A believer is merely an instrument through whom He has the opportunity to work by His grace. Evangelizing Christians present the truth so the Spirit of God might use it in the lives of those He has elected.

**Balance in Responsibility.** How do the sovereignty of God and a Christian's responsibility in proclaiming the Gospel fit together? Alva J. McClain, a former president of Grace Theological Seminary, made the statement that Romans 9 ought never be studied apart from Romans 10. Romans 9 conveys why some people are saved, but Romans 10 relates why some people are lost.

Paul summarizes the fact that God is in charge, not man, in Romans 9:16, "So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Verse 19 raises the question, "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' " If God is sovereignly determining the course of events and the destiny of mankind, why does He find fault with those who function in a way contrary to the Scriptures? After all, since everything is happening according to His determination, who can resist His will?

**God Not Obligated to Answer.** Paul acknowledges that this is a question that many would like to have answered, but no answer is given in Scripture. Paul concludes that man is not in a position to ask such a question. God has told His creation that He is sovereignly in control of everything. In verse 20 Paul mentions that God is the potter and man is the clay. God does just as He chooses with His clay. That is as much as man can understand because God has not chosen to say more about it.

It is settled that God is completely sovereign in determining the destiny of man. In Romans 9:30, Paul moves on to the subject of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law (vs. 30,31).

The Gentiles were never interested in keeping the Law of God as given to Moses in the Old Testament, yet the Gentiles have attained righteousness. They acquired that for which they were not looking because they attained it by faith. They believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, they have righteousness. In contrast, the Jews, who were so meticulously trying to keep the details of the Law, could not attain righteousness through the Law. The Law could reveal sin, but it could not provide righteousness.

There are 613 commandments in the Old Testament. Obviously, no one attained the righteousness that the Law offered because no one kept the Law perfectly except Jesus Christ. He did not need righteousness. He had it by virtue of who He was.

The Gentiles experienced salvation by believing while the Jews did not. They stumbled over Jesus Christ.

Why? Because *they* did not *pursue* it by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over *the stumbling stone*, just as it is written, “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED” (Rom. 9:32,33). Jesus Christ was an obstacle to the Jews and they stumbled over Him.

**Prayer and the Sovereignty of God.** Paul begins Romans 10 by saying, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them [Israel] is for *their* salvation” (v. 1). This is an interesting statement, especially in light of the fact that Paul has just explained that God’s sovereignty determines the destiny of all men. Yet Paul says he has a burden to pray for the salvation of Israel. If God has already determined to save any Jews, He will save those Jews. If He has not determined to save them, all the praying in the world will not change that.

The apostle who wrote in chapter 9 about the sovereignty of God and its relationship to the election of believers is the same apostle who wrote chapter 10. In Romans 10, Paul says his heart’s desire and prayer to God is that Israel be saved. That helps put things in the proper balance.

Why should Christians pray if God has already elected some for salvation? Why should believers witness and be burdened for the lost if God has sovereignly determined their destiny? Yet Paul says he is burdened, praying for their salvation. This is consistent with the teaching of Scripture as written by Peter. “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Paul is praying according to the burden God has given him for them. These two points should be the guidelines for the Christian’s prayer life. It is scriptural to pray for the salvation of the lost, and God gives believers a burden to pray for them.

Paul and Christ prayed for the salvation of the lost. God gives



particular burdens to certain individuals to pray for the salvation of specific people. If God has given you a burden to pray for certain family members and friends, you ought to follow the example of the Apostle Paul with Israel—take those people to the Lord in prayer. It may be that the Spirit has burdened you to pray for them, and God is going to answer your prayer to save them. Therefore, there is no contradiction between Paul's burden to pray for the salvation of Israel and the fact that God has sovereignly determined the destiny of those He has elected.

### ***Man Needs Salvation***

In Romans 10, Paul continues his discussion of the Jews who are typically religious people.

For I bear witness that they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God (vs. 2,3).

**Self-righteousness Insufficient.** Paul testifies that the Jews are zealous for God and that there are no more religious people on the face of the earth. He says that they are ignorant of the fact that there is nothing they can do to acquire righteousness; it can only be obtained by believing in Jesus Christ. They are trying to establish their own righteousness. Paul points out that in doing so they are rejecting the righteousness God has provided for them.

Religious people today make the same errors. They are so busy being religious and trying to be acceptable before God that they neglect the righteousness God has provided for them at no cost. The only righteousness that is of any value is the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

**The Message of Salvation.** Paul then discusses the matter of revelation—how one finds out about God. There were some who thought they should bring Christ back from the grave to find out how to get to heaven, but, the revelation has already been given according to Romans 10:8: "But what does it say? 'THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART'—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching." What is necessary for righteousness is the word of faith which Paul is proclaiming. It is the message that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for the sins of man. When a person believes

that message, he experiences the salvation that God has provided.

What does the message contain? “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (v. 9). It is interesting to note how often confession and faith are brought together. There is no contradiction in these terms. In 1 John, confession is equated with salvation five times in 1:9; 2:23; 4:2,3,15. Jesus made the same point in Matthew 10:32: “Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.”

Confession means to say the same thing. Christ said that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34). A person who agrees with God concerning Jesus Christ is indicating his faith in Jesus Christ—the concepts go hand in hand. One who does not agree with God about Jesus Christ does not believe in Jesus Christ. Of course, it is possible for a person to say something and not believe it. But 1 John 4:3 says, “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.” The one who does not confess Jesus is not saved.

Romans 10:10 continues, “for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” This is not saying that there are two things that bring about salvation. Faith in Jesus Christ results in righteousness. Inseparably linked with that is the concept of acknowledging who Jesus Christ is. You cannot be saved if you do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord—the One who died and has been raised from the dead. The Lordship of Christ is always related to His resurrection in the New Testament. That is an essential ingredient in salvation.

As noted previously, Romans 9 discusses the sovereignty of God in determining the destiny of men. Men are saved because of the gracious work of God in electing them. Why are men lost? Chapter 10 discusses man’s responsibility and why men are lost. They are lost because they will not believe in Jesus Christ. If you will believe what you have been reading, you will be saved. It is just that simple—Jesus Christ died for your sins. Believe in Him and you will be saved. If you are not saved, it is because of your own decision. You simply refuse to believe Him. That is your responsibility, not God’s.

In Romans 10:11 Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16: “WHOEVER BE-

LIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” Everyone gets what is promised—righteousness and salvation. “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for ‘WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED’ ” (vs. 12,13). There is only one source of salvation for the Jew and Gentile alike.

**The Process for Salvation.** The process for salvation begins in verse 14.

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (vs. 14,15).

The process is really very simple. God sends a preacher, someone hears the message proclaimed, he believes it and calls upon the name of the Lord. Calling upon the name of the Lord becomes synonymous with believing. When you believe the message concerning Christ, you turn to God for your salvation and call upon Him. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul used the same expression in 1 Corinthians 1:2 indicating that the Corinthians are saints who have called upon the name of the Lord. If you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, you will turn to Him for your salvation; in effect, you will call upon Him. You seek your salvation from Him, not from your own good works or from keeping the Law.

### ***The Believer Is a Herald***

It is important to notice the process. Paul does not say, “How shall they call upon Him if they have not been elected?” or, “How shall they believe in Him if they have not been elected?” Rather, he says, “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14). The word “preacher” in this verse is not to be thought of in the technical sense as the vocation of a preacher. Rather, the word indicates a herald, one who speaks or proclaims an appointed message. A herald is one who is given a message to proclaim. That is true of every believer—believers are those who herald Jesus Christ. Believers have an appointed message about Him to proclaim. Only those who are sent can do that. This refers to the fact that only those who are believers in Jesus Christ can tell people about salvation in Him.

So what is a believer's responsibility? A believer is one who has been sent by God to present the message that God has given to him. This seems too simple. God has not instructed believers to come up with a good, convincing message. If He had told you to write a story of salvation to tell your friends, where would you begin? When you finished, it would be so complicated no one would understand it. He has not asked believers to originate a message; that is not the responsibility of a herald. A herald is simply to take the message he has been given and pass it on to those to whom he has been told to communicate it.

God has given believers the message that Jesus Christ, God's Son, died for sin. If a person will believe in Christ's death on his behalf, he will be saved. That is the message He has given believers to proclaim.

Paul saw no conflict between his responsibility to proclaim the message God had given him and the fact of God's election of certain individuals to salvation. Paul was supposed to proclaim the message because that is God's pattern in calling out the elect. God's purpose for a believer is to be one who makes Jesus Christ known. The amazing simplicity of this message confuses people. A four year old can take that message and pass it on to someone else.

Do not get tied up in trying to figure out God's responsibility in election so that you lose sight of the fact that He has given a message to proclaim. In His sovereignty He will use that message according to His plan, but a believer's responsibility is to pass on the message. Have you passed the message on this week? No one can be saved without hearing the message. "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). The elect cannot be saved if they do not hear the Gospel. In God's plan it is ordained that they will hear it from us in many cases.

**Fear in Witnessing.** The simplicity of this message is amazing, yet adults get tongue-tied in trying to share it. People can talk about many other things very fluently. Yet, it is so difficult to herald the message God has given. People often grasp for the excuse, "I don't have the gift of evangelism." Having the gift of evangelism is not a requirement for being a herald. It is easy to hide behind that excuse. However, whether one has the gift of evangelism or not does not change the fact that believers are heralds to make the message of Christ known.

**Fragrance in Witnessing.** The same principles come through clearly in 2 Corinthians 2. To those Corinthian believers Paul wrote, “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place” (2 Cor. 2:14). In this passage Paul uses the analogy of a pleasing fragrance. As believers give off the knowledge of Christ making Him known to others, this is a pleasing fragrance to God. He is pleased when a believer makes Jesus Christ known. Such action is a sweet aroma to Him and believers are to make the knowledge of Him known in every place. Is there any place you have been this week where Jesus Christ is still unknown?

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 2:15, “For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” This passage can revolutionize one’s thinking about ministry. It is easy to think that God is pleased when people get saved as a result of heralding the message, but God is pleased when Christ is made known whether people believe it or not. What is important: what God thinks or what men think?

Believers constantly have to remind themselves that they are heralds, those who are to make Jesus Christ known in every place. There can be opportunities in many different circumstances. Think about the time spent in an airplane. It is easy to think, *the person next to me does not want to listen to me. I need to relax and take it easy. I do not like talking to strangers.* If I sit there and don’t tell that person about Jesus Christ, who will? And besides, why shouldn’t I tell him? He isn’t going anywhere until we land. I sit there shoulder to shoulder with that person knowing I have a certain amount of time to tell him about a matter that has eternal significance, but yet I wonder whether or not I ought to do it. If I make Jesus Christ known to him, God is pleased with that. What do I care whether or not he thinks I am a nut? Scripture tells me that if I make Jesus Christ known to him, that will be pleasing to God. But if I think he might not like it, so I make a decision on the basis of not offending him, that shows I am more concerned with what he thinks of me than of what God thinks of me. That lets me know I have a problem with my spiritual life.

Think of all the places you have gone during the past week. In how many of those places have you made Jesus Christ known? As you have made your appearance at all of those places, has your

presence made any difference about the knowledge of Christ being made known there? Unfortunately, it is so easy to never get around to matters that are of eternal importance.

### ***A Proper Perspective on Evangelism***

**The Reality of Death.** One of the things that helps keep this in proper perspective is to be reminded of the reality of death. Today's society and culture tries to hide death as much as possible by removing death and dying from view. People often die in hospitals or rest homes away from their families and friends. That seems to mute the reality of death to some extent. A reminder of the reality of death helps put life in a better perspective. Paul gives a reminder of the process of dying at the end of 2 Corinthians 4. He mentions that his body is getting older, it is gradually deteriorating and it is only a matter of time until he will be taken by death.

Whether short or long, it is only a matter of time until everyone faces death unless Jesus Christ comes. It is important to live in light of that fact.

In the first ten verses of 2 Corinthians 5, Paul goes into a deep discussion of the death of a believer. He tells believers that when they leave their bodies, they will be going into the presence of the Lord. That is an encouraging prospect. For Paul being in the presence of the Lord was preferable to continuing in this life. "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

**Motivation for Witnessing.** One's view of death affects the way one uses his life. "Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him" (2 Cor. 5:9). For Paul, he states that the determining factor in his life is to be pleasing to God. In light of the fact that he was going to spend eternity with God, this was his ambition. The English word "ambition" comes from a Latin word meaning "two"—as a double-minded person, or one who will do two things. He may do anything to get ahead. He may say one thing at one place and another somewhere else if it will help him get ahead. The Greek word is a little more honorable. It means a lover of honor; thus it came to mean ambition.

What is your ambition in life? What makes you go? What do you live for? What determines the activities of your life day after

day? Paul said his ambition was to be pleasing to God. Everything else in his life is seen in subjection to that ambition. Most Christians mouth that as their goal, but how many live it?

**The Judgment Seat of Christ.** Paul had a motivation for his desire to be pleasing to the Lord. It was fear.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

Paul knew that some day he was going to stand in the presence of Jesus Christ who is going to evaluate his life, including everything he has done while living in this body.

The “judgment seat of Christ” (v.10), also known as the *bema* seat of Christ, refers to the judgment of believers. Believers will not be there to be judged for their sin because Christ bore all the penalty for their sins when He died on the cross. But they will be judged according to what they have done with their bodies, whether good or bad. Bad does not denote sinful in this case, but rather worthless. Believers are judged in light of what was profitable and what was worthless. All the neutral things done in their lives are classified as worthless. The neutral things are not necessarily good, not necessarily bad, they just have no value in light of eternity.

It is of great concern that believers often fill their lives with trivia which has little eternal significance. Their lives become filled with trivial matters just like the unbeliever. All of those activities that would be considered mundane will be lumped in a pile of worthlessness.

Paul said, “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). The connection between the elements in these verses is interesting. Paul starts out with his ambition being to please God because he is going to stand before Christ and be evaluated and judged by Him. That causes fear in him—not a scared kind of fear, but rather a fear of awe or reverence. If you don’t stand in awe of the fact that someday you are going to stand in the presence of Jesus Christ and be exposed for exactly what you are and what you have done, you don’t have any conception of what Paul is talking about. That concept should provoke everyone to awesome reverence and fear of God. Such an evaluation of one’s life comes about

as a result of realistically facing the meaning of death. Death reminds everyone that they are going to stand in His presence to be judged.

**Seriousness in Witnessing.** There are those who take very lightly their presentation of the Gospel. They conclude that it doesn't really make any difference to them how the person responds. Since they can't save the unbeliever, they think that all they can do is tell the person of his need, then the responsibility is shifted to the unbeliever. Gospel presentations using that approach will be piled on the worthless stack in the presence of Jesus Christ. That is not the way Jesus Christ confronted men. Neither is it the way the Apostle Paul confronted them. Paul saw that his responsibility was to persuade men.

What about the doctrine of election? Doesn't Paul understand about the sovereignty of God? He can't persuade anybody to be saved; only God can save men.

Yet, Paul saw his responsibility to persuade men to trust Christ. The Gospel must be presented with the desire that the person who hears it will believe it. It is important to try to persuade him to trust Christ. It is not a matter of indifference; it is a matter of utmost importance. Our greatest desire in telling men that Christ died to pay the penalty for their sins is that they might believe it. That is to be a controlling and motivating factor in witnessing.

**A New Control.** In 2 Corinthians 5:14 Paul said, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." "Controls" means to have in the grip. It is used of Peter's mother-in-law when she had a fever; she was in the grip of the fever. It means to be pressed in. Can you say the love of Christ is what controls you? Are you in the grips of the love of Christ?

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, *he* is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." It is a tragedy that Christians do not look any different than others in the world. Christians are to be totally new and totally different. They are to be living in the grip of the love of Jesus Christ, with their only ambition to be pleasing to Him. Every ambitious Christian should be ambitious to please God, but that is not the case. Christians should be in the grip of His love, recognizing that His love is manifested in the fact that He died for



them so they can live for Him. If Christians truly recognize that fact, they will be persuading men to trust Christ.

**Privilege Coupled with Responsibility.** In the first half of 2 Corinthians 5:18 Paul states the fact that God has reconciled believers to Himself through Christ. But there is more to the verse: "Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." God has also given believers the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry is tied to the fact that believers are to be a herald. There is a message to proclaim; the ministry of reconciliation has been committed to believers.

Speaking of that ministry of reconciliation, Paul continues, "Namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). He then states the intended result of reconciliation, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (v.20). There is no cold indifference in these statements. Paul urges his readers to understand that someday they will stand in the presence of Christ to give an account for their lives. He wants them to have as their ambition to be pleasing to Him.

Do you really understand that you are going to stand in the presence of Christ and be evaluated for what you have done? Are you living in the grip of the love of Christ? The manifestation of that will be seen in your proclaiming the message of reconciliation to other people. What have you done of eternal significance this week? It is tempting to look at others and feel they are wasting their lives. As God looks at you, does He feel you are wasting your life, or are you utilizing the opportunities God is giving you in light of eternity?

Second Corinthians 5 closes with the summary in verse 21. "He made Him who knew no sin to *be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That is the message. Everyone can share that simple message with someone else. If one is convinced of its reality and importance and is ambitious to be pleasing to Him, then he will be sharing it. Believers have a tremendous responsibility to reach those around them. Some day each believer will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account to Him for

whether or not he has been faithful in this responsibility.

Paul didn't sit in his rocking chair hoping Israel would be saved. He went out and spread to them the message of Christ so they might hear and believe. That is the privilege, responsibility and obligation God has given believers.

### ***Conclusion***

In summary, all humanity is lost by birth and by choice. We are sinners exercising our wills in rebellion against God. The fact of the matter is, "Whosoever will may come," but men will not come. If you do not believe in Jesus Christ, you have no one to blame but yourself. Man will not come to Christ because of his sinfulness, his pride, his arrogance and his rebellious character. But out of this rebellious group, God has sovereignly selected some, not on the basis of who they are or what they do, but simply on the sovereign basis of His own determination. He has chosen them to experience the salvation He has provided in His Son Jesus Christ.

What does God do with the rest that He does not choose? He leaves them where they choose to be—in their sin, under condemnation, destined for hell. That is fair because they are there by their choice, not by God's choice. They have chosen to sin, to rebel against Him; they have chosen to reject His salvation. He leaves them in their chosen position—just condemnation.

All of this is for God's glory—even those who will not believe. Each unbeliever is justly condemned because of his sin. Each believer is saved as a result of God's sovereign work. In eternity past, God chose some to salvation. In time, He is working out that program of sovereignly drawing to His Son, Jesus Christ, those He has elected, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit He is causing them to believe. This doctrine causes me to be in awe of God.

In the study of this doctrine, it becomes more clear that no one can say, "I understand it all." If you think you do, that just shows you don't understand it yet. The more you understand about it, the more clearly you see that you can't understand it. You begin to feel like David expressed, "*Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is *too* high, I cannot attain to it" (Ps. 139:6). This should cause us to bow down and worship the God who is so sovereign and so gracious that He has seen fit to save some from among sinful

humanity.

What about you? Are you one who has believed in His Son, Jesus Christ? You may think you are not one of the elect. Maybe you are not, but maybe you are. The very fact that you are reading this is an indication that God is doing a work in your life. In His grace He has given you an opportunity to understand the fact that Jesus Christ died for your sins. This salvation is now offered to you. If you will believe it, you are one of the elect. If you will not believe it, you have no one to blame but yourself. But the exciting fact is that God has made it possible for you to hear this message. If you have not believed it yet, it is offered to you now.

Jesus Christ is coming again. No one knows when that will be, but it is imperative that men and women hear the message of Jesus Christ so that the Spirit of God might use that message to draw them to salvation through faith in Christ. Christians had better be about that work. What a tragedy it would be for a believer to stand before Christ and find out he had filled his life with worthless things. Believers, as sons of God, have the privilege of doing things which matter for eternity. God help us to devote our lives to these eternal kinds of things.

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