

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

(LESSON ELEVEN)

THE ELECTION OF GOD

(PART TWO)

In the previous Lesson, we noted that the aspect of God's sovereignty that has provoked the most controversy in theological circles is the one that deals with His plan of salvation, particularly as it concerns the decree of election. We stated that the concepts of predestination and election are biblical ones and therefore cannot be dismissed by us but that it is our responsibility to grapple with them and endeavor to understand them.

We explained that predestination is not the same thing as election, although they are closely related. We said that predestination has to do with God's decrees concerning anything. Election, we said, is a specific type of predestination. It deals with God's choosing certain persons in Christ for the purpose of salvation and to be adopted into the family of God. We defined election as "a decree of God before creation in which He chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of His sovereign grace."

We read several passages which addressed the ideas of predestination and election and indicated that in the following Lesson we would examine some of these in greater detail. It is to this matter that we will now address ourselves.

ACTS 13:46-48

*"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.**"*

Persons have tried to lessen the force of verse 48 by using all kinds of clever but futile arguments. The Word of God is very clear: "*As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.*" It is significant that Luke mentions the fact of election here almost in passing. It is as if this were the normal occurrence whenever the gospel is preached.

There are four truths in this verse that we desire to highlight:

1. Believing is the consequence of God's decree. Believing is not the cause of God's decree. In other word, it is not our faith that causes God to ordain us to eternal life. Rather, it is our ordination to eternal life that causes us to have faith.
2. All persons are not ordained to eternal life for the verse says, "*as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*" If all men without exception were ordained by God, then the words "*as many as*" would be a meaningless qualification.
3. The "ordination" spoken of here is not an ordination to service or to any other external benefit, but to salvation for the verse says that they were "*ordained to eternal life.*" The ordination was to salvation itself.
4. The verse makes it clear that all who were so ordained believed. There was not one who was so ordained that did not believe. This indicates clearly that all who are thus ordained by God to eternal life will most certainly believe and be saved. In this regard let us consider **Acts 16:13-14**: "*And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*"

Please note that the Bible does not say that it was when Lydia attended unto the words of Paul that the Lord opened her heart. No, no, no! Rather, it was the Lord who had to open Lydia's heart in order for her to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul! In other words, if the Lord had not opened her heart Lydia would not have believed Paul's teaching.

Commenting on **Acts 13:48** the "Prince of preachers," C.S. Spurgeon said the following: "Attempts have been made to prove that these words do not teach predestination, but these attempts so clearly do violence to language that I shall not waste time in answering them. I read: 'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed,' and I shall not twist the text but shall glorify the grace of God by ascribing to that grace the faith of every man. Is it not God who gives the disposition to believe? If men are disposed to have eternal life, does not He-in every case-dispose them? Is it wrong for God to give grace? If it be right for Him to give it, is it wrong for Him to *purpose* to give it? Would you have Him give it by accident? If it is right for Him to purpose to give grace today, it was right for Him to purpose it before today-and, since He changes not-from eternity."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-29

*"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: **But God hath chosen** the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; **and God hath chosen** the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, **hath God chosen**, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."*

It will be noticed that Paul makes reference to **God's Choice** three times in this passage. Choice necessarily supposes a selection-the picking of some and the leaving of others. The One doing the choosing here is God Himself, as is the case always. In John **15:16** our Lord said to His disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

The number chosen is also strictly defined. Paul says, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." The ones who are chosen of God are "the foolish things of the world," "the weak things of the world," "base things of the world," "things which are despised," "and things which are not." But why does God choose such inferior material? "That no flesh should glory in his presence," but that "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." God makes choice of the foolish things, the weak things, the base things, the despised things, and the nothings in order to demonstrate and magnify His grace.

The carnal mind of human beings naturally supposes that God would have chosen for salvation many from the ranks of the wise and the mighty and the rich and the cultured and the influential, so that Christianity might have won the approval and applause of the world by its external magnificence and fleshly glory. But let us remember what our Lord said in **Luke 16:15**: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: **for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.**"

EPHESIANS 1:3-6, 11

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

Here Paul not only informs us that God made choice of some who were to be His children by Jesus Christ, but also of the point in time - if indeed we can so speak of a point in time - when God chose them. Please note carefully that it was not after Adam had fallen and plunged the future human race into sin and wretchedness, but long before Adam was formed, even before the world itself was created, that God chose us in Christ.

Paul also tells us of the **purpose** which God had before Him in connection with His own elect: it was that they “*should be holy and without blame before Him*” (verse 4); it was “*unto the adoption of children*” (verse 5); it was that they should “*obtain an inheritance*” (verse 11). God chose us in order that we should be holy and blameless. He chose us in order to adopt us as sons into His family. He chose us in order to give us an inheritance.

Incidentally, just in case anyone here may be wondering how in the world you will ever ultimately be holy and blameless before Him, we remind you of the Word of the Lord found in **Jude 24-25**: “*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*”

In this passage we also discover the **motive** which prompted God to make choice of some persons in Christ before the foundation of the world. It has been said by misguided persons that, for God to decide the eternal destiny of His creatures before they are born, is tyrannical and unjust. But Paul refutes such a view in verses 5 and 6 of the passage: He says, “*In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*” (**English Standard Version**). It was love that motivated God’s choice of us, a “love that stoops,” it was amazing grace!

Finally, we are informed here, in verse 5 and 11 that in this matter-the matter of the election of persons unto salvation, God took counsel with no one. Paul tells us that we are “*predestinated according to the good pleasure of His will,*” and “*according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*”

2 THESSALONIANS 2:7-14

7 *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.*

8 *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:*

9 *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,*

10 *And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

11 *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:*

12 *That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

13 *But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because **God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation** through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*

14 *Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

There are three things in verse 13 which need to be highlighted. Firstly, Paul states emphatically that God’s choice of His elect was with a view to securing their salvation. He says, “*God hath from the beginning **chosen you for salvation.***” Paul’s language could not be more explicit. He exposes the fallacy of those who argue that when the word “election” is mentioned in the Bible it refers to position, service, or function. It is to “salvation” itself that God hath chosen us according to this verse.

Secondly, we are told here that election unto salvation does not disregard the use of divinely appointed means. Salvation is reached through “*sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*” It is not true that because God has chosen certain persons to salvation that they will be saved without the application to their lives of the means by which salvation is secured.

They are not saved whether they believe or not, as some who oppose the doctrine of election sarcastically state. How silly such a statement is! How it betrays a lack of intellectual maturity! Beloved ones, the same God who predestined the end also appointed the means; the same God who “chose unto salvation” decreed that His purpose should be realized through the work of the Spirit and belief of the truth. What is so difficult about that for even a child to grasp?

Thirdly, the fact that God has chosen us unto salvation is a profound cause for us to praise our great God. Listen again to Paul. Notice how forcibly he expresses himself: **“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”** Instead of reacting negatively in respect of the doctrine of election as many do, the Christian whose eyes are opened to this blessed truth as it is unfolded in the Word, is led to fall on his or her face before Almighty God and worship and express gratitude to Him for His marvelous grace.

2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Brothers and sisters, this is not at all an obscure passage that is difficult to understand. It is a very clear passage! The Word of God speaks “expressly” here. In fact, it is not possible to state the case more clearly, or strongly, than it is stated here. Paul informs us that our salvation is *“not according to our works.”* Our salvation is not due to anything inherent in us and it is not a reward for anything we have done or may do. Rather, it is the result of God’s *“own purpose and grace.”* This grace Paul says, *“was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”* It is by grace that we are saved, and in the purpose of God this grace was bestowed upon us not only before we were born or even conceived in the womb of our mothers, but *“before the world began.”*

In **Genesis 1:1** we read, *“In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth,”* but God chose us in Christ before that! And it is in this wonderful truth that the great security and comfort of God’s people rests. Is it not reasonable to suppose that since God’s choice of us has been from eternity that His choice of us will last to eternity? Is it not reasonable to assume that nothing can survive to eternity except that which came out of eternity? Is it not reasonable to expect that whatever has come *from* eternity will come *to* eternity?

We will now briefly consider a passage that we did not look at in **Lesson 10**.

1 PETER 1:1-2

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

The apostle Peter advises us here that our election by God the Father takes place before we are “saved and sanctified.” Peter thus indicates that our election has absolutely nothing to do with us but has everything to do with the Sovereign pleasure of the Almighty.

It is important for us to understand that when Peter speaks of the *“foreknowledge of God the Father,”* he is not referring to prescience - God’s knowledge about all things, but to the fact that the saints were all eternally present in Christ in the mind of God. Peter is not arguing that God knew before-hand that certain persons who heard the Gospel would believe it and that He elected these persons to salvation based on this prior knowledge. Peter is saying that God had ordained these certain persons to eternal life.

What God foreknew was that without His ordination, without Him choosing them first, no human being would ever have chosen Him! In other words, the “foreknowledge” of God is based upon His own decrees! Peter’s words in **Acts 2:22-23** makes this very clear: “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*”

It is critical for us to take note of the order revealed here. Peter first makes mention of God’s “determinate counsel,” or God’s decree and then, afterwards of His “foreknowledge.” The words of the disciples in **Acts 4:27-28** are remarkably similar: “*For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel **determined before to be done.***”

Finally, it needs to be pointed out that when we read in Scripture of God “knowing” certain people the word is used in the sense of knowing with an approval that is based on love. In **1 Corinthians 8:2-3** Paul writes, “*And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. **But if any man love God, the same is known of him.***” Did you hear that beloved? “*If any man love God, the same is known of him.*”

The **New Living Translation** renders verse **3** as follows: “*But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes.*” And yet to others our Lord will say, “***I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity***” (**Matthew 7:23**).

Let us now look at what we have learned from the teaching of the passages that we have considered in this Lesson. We have learned that God has “ordained to eternal life” certain persons, and that as a result of His ordination these persons, in due time, “believe” and are saved. We have learned that God’s ordination to salvation of His own elect is not due to any good thing in them nor to anything meritorious that they have done, but solely because of His grace. We have learned that God seems to have intentionally and deliberately selected the most unworthy, most undeserving persons to be the recipients of His special favour in order that “*no flesh should glory in His presence.*” We have learned that God chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world, not because they **were** “*holy and without blame,*” but in order that they “*should be holy and without blame before Him.*” We have learned that it was His love for us that motivated Him to choose us. We have learned that after He selected certain persons to salvation, He also decreed the means by which they would actually be saved. We have learned that the very grace by which we are saved was “*given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,*” and that this was what God had purposed to do. We have learned that long before they were actually created God’s elect stood present before His mind - they were “foreknown” by Him and that this means that they were the definite objects of His eternal love.

Beloved ones, a word or two before we go. Those who oppose the doctrines of predestination and election as we have outlined them invariably try to find some reason, apart from of God’s own will and purpose which motivates Him to grant salvation to sinful men and women. They desperately search for something or other to credit fallen, unregenerate sinners with which entitles them to receive mercy and grace at the hands of their Creator. So, we ask the question, “Why did God choose the persons that He did?” What was it that was in those who were elected unto salvation that so touched the heart of God that He could not help but elect them?

Was it because of certain virtues that they possessed in a greater degree than others? Were they more even-tempered and good-natured and had the “milk of human kindness” flowing by the quart in their veins? Was it because they were better than others? That is surely not the case for **Romans 3:10** says, “*There is none righteous, no, not one,*” and Paul writes in **Romans 7:18** “*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing,*” and **Romans 9:21** tells us that it is of the “*same lump*” that the Divine potter molds one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour, and **1 Corinthians 4:7** asks, “*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?*”

and **Ephesians 2:1-3** says that we were “*dead in trespasses and sins,*” that we “*walked according to the course of this world,*” and that we all fulfilled “*the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*”

Why did God choose the persons that He did? Was it perchance because of good works that they had performed? Certainly not for it is written, “*There is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (**Romans 3:12**). Was it because they were desperately seeking after God? No; for it is written again, “*There is none that seeketh after God*” (**Romans 3:11**). Many would argue that it was because God foresaw that they would believe? Is this really so? “Does the Scripture support such a view?” Assuredly not; for how can those who are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” believe in Christ? How could God foreknow some men as believers when belief was impossible to them? We have already seen when we examined **Acts 13:46-48**, that it is through the instrumentality of grace that we are enabled to believe. In **Acts 18:27** we read, “*And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.*”

Brothers and sisters, we must bear in mind that faith is a gift from God. Paul informs us of this in **Ephesians 2:8**. He writes, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*” We know that not every person has been granted this gift of faith. In **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** Paul writes, “*Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.*” Apart from this gift none would believe. This is why In **Titus 1:1** we read about **the faith of God’s elect**: “*Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.*”

Beloved, the truth is that the **cause** of God’s choice lies entirely within Himself and not in the objects of His choice. He chose the ones He did simply because He chose to choose them.