

## The Sovereignty of God (Part 7)

### Predestination

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We're going to begin with a scripture that we read the last time I spoke on this subject in Acts the 13th chapter. We're going to begin with just a little bit of a background leading up to this very important subject in verse 48. In Acts 13, beginning in verse 14, we find that Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Pisidia, and Paul began preaching to the people there in a synagogue, and as was his normal *modus operandi*, he went to the synagogue, preached to the Jews first, and if there happened to be any Gentiles present, then they also heard what Paul had to say.

Acts 13:27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not.

He's talking about Jesus. The only reason I'm reading this verse is because I want you to remember this a little bit later in the sermon, because it's going to have a small measure of importance to something a little bit later. "They knew him not." We've been saying a few things about this "knowing God."

Acts 13:27 ...nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them [the prophecies] in condemning him.

Then there was an uproar there because the Jews rejected what Paul was saying.

Acts 13:44-45 And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

That's when Paul and Barnabas grew real strong in the things they said, and what they said was again rejected.

Acts 13:48 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.

We're going to spend a little bit of time on that word "ordained". It won't be a great deal of time, but I want to give a little more background on it, because I think it's interesting to

understand this thing of "sovereignty" and our relationship to God as a result of His sovereignty, and this ordination that we see here. Now the word ordination means "appointed." That is the way most modern Bibles translate it. Here's a quote from the *Expositor's Commentary* on this phrase.

"Who were ordained believed, suggests that belief in Christ is not a matter of one's faith, but primarily involves divine appointment."

That statement is not exactly correct, but it does at least acknowledge that something more than faith is involved in what we are today and what these people became, whenever this occurred in Antioch. The sovereignty of God is involved in what we are predestined to become—Christians. Now Acts 13: 48 agrees exactly with Romans 8: 29-30.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Now one commentator on this verse, Acts 13: 48, said that that word, translated "ordained" or "appointed," means "adapted" or "frame of mind." Now he said that because he wanted to shy away from the concept of predestination. The Bible reveals, as we're going to see, who adapted our minds to eternal life, if we want to use that word. If you care to do any research into this word, you are going to find that the word literally means, "to set in a certain order."

You might say, "adapt" to a certain situation. It also means to constitute. It means to appoint. It is used that way according to Strong's and Zodhiates and every commentary that I saw that made a comment on this verse, with the exception of that one, which said the word means, "adapted." Now the commentaries sometimes did say that it is controversial, because it involves a measure of predestination.

But brethren, it does mean exactly what it says in regard to the subject of predestination. Flip back in your mind to Romans 8 and verses 29 and 30. Does verse 30 not include predestination, along with justification, which we also firmly believe God gives and is part of the salvation process, and is this process not carried all the way to glorification? So we have predestination, justification, glorification.

Now if we're going to believe that we are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ, and this process goes all the way to glorification where we are transformed, then we also have to accept the fact that this verse says that predestination is involved in this process—that God foreknew us (i.e. He knew us before we were called) and He predetermined that He would justify us and that He would glorify us. You can't kick one of these things out (one of these terms) without kicking the other two. We have to be consistent. Justification, glorification, and predestination (or divine appointment) is part of this process.

As we saw there in Acts 13:48, only those who were appointed to eternal life believed. There was something done to them by God that enabled them to believe. It was done to them by God because He predestined them. Now by this, I do not mean to imply, in any way, that every act of a person's life is predestined, but that God does summon some, and not others. That is obvious right from there in Acts 13, verse 48. Some He calls, some He doesn't.

You know that from your own personal experience. Someone can hear exactly the same message that you did, and it doesn't mean the same thing to them as it does to you. God does summon some to be saved. Some who are not going to be saved, He does not summon. Now doesn't the word "called" and the much stronger word "summon" (which seems to have a legal connotation to it—a stronger one) indicate a separation of one from maybe several, or many others?

Parents, I want you to think about this. If your child is playing outside with some other children and you go out and call him—let's say summon him, isn't that calling specifically for him? And isn't the result of that, that it separates him from the group that he is with? After you call the child, do you not then begin to reveal to the child why you called him? Why did you separate him away from the group?

You may have said to the child, "Go wash your hands. We're going to eat dinner." Or, "Get ready for bed." Or, "Run this errand for me." Or, "Go and clean up your room." Or, you might just say to him, "I just wanted to see that you were all right." Now this is very similar in principle to God's calling of us. He, by His Spirit, supernaturally calls and begins to separate us away from others. As He does this, He also begins revealing Himself and His way. He and His way must be revealed. He doesn't do this to everybody, and neither does the parent who, before calling his child, predestines which child he wants.

God must do this, because we are so deceived as to what to look for. We would never find Him. In addition to that, we are so busy doing our own thing (usually playing around, just like kids) that we don't even care. Even though He reveals Himself, it still takes us a long time to really come to know Him.

One of the reasons this circumstance is controversial is because human nature does not take pleasure in being humbled to understand that salvation is far more an act of God than it is something that we have earned, because it is so good, and they have been so strong, and they have been so pure, and they have been so wise and so faithful, and loved God so deeply and searched so hard. Human nature is so perverse, that even in this, in the face of much evidence—vanity wants to take credit for what it simply has not deserved credit for.

Look at this in all of its stark reality that God shows through the children of Israel being chosen as God's covenant people—being freed from Egypt, the trek through the wilderness, and finally the making of it into the promised land. The only reason Israel made it was because of what God did. Had Israel not had God working in their behalf, the very best that they could have done is dream of what was accomplished, and complain because of the situation that they were in. They would never have made it into the type of the Kingdom of God.

Okay. Again, the principle of God's operation shown in this analogy is no different with us. Now, does God have every act of a person's life planned out in advance—that is, already

predetermined? If that is so, where is free moral agency? If that is so, why do we need faith? If that is so, the need for prayer is greatly diminished, if it is even needed at all. If that is so, it seems to me that we would really be nothing more than a puppet on a string.

Turn with me to II Peter 3:9, as we continue to talk about this subject of predestination and free moral agency.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Now, God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He does not say there that some will not perish. He is saying that it is His will that they won't perish. However, we know that there is a lake of fire. Remember, He's not willing that any should perish—but there is a lake of fire. And Revelation 20 makes it very clear that there are going to be at least two people that are going to perish.

Now is there a contradiction here? There is a contradiction only if every act is already planned out. God makes it very clear that it is His will that we keep His commandments. But is He there forcing you to keep them? Not at all. That is our choice. But it's His will that we keep it. Just as true as that is, it is His will that nobody perish, and yet we know from God's word that some are going to perish. So, He has not predestined every act that every person does. Let's make something along this line even clearer.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, [He says] lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Now, if everything is already predetermined, why should we fear? Well, the answer is, everything is not predetermined. He's not willing that we should perish, but we are told to fear, lest we fall short—lest we even seem to fall short. The lesson here is taken from the children of Israel. God willed to give them the land of Canaan He promised to their fathers.

However, many of the people chose to die in the wilderness through their disobedience. They didn't have to die there. He was fully willing. Hear that word? Fully willing to take them into the Promised Land at the end of the second year; but they chose otherwise. They chose to disobey and not go in at His command because they lacked faith, and because they lacked faith they feared the people of the land and decided that it was too fearful to go in there.

So their fear worked against them. As a result, God judged what they did and said that they would all die in the wilderness, and they wouldn't go into the land until that generation that disobeyed died. So, as it more literally says here, their bodies were strewn from one end of the wilderness to the other, because they chose to die in the wilderness.

You see, the lesson to us (at least in terms of this particular subject of predestination) is though God has willed that we have eternal life, and God has willed that we be in the Kingdom of God, we also have free moral agency. Therefore we must fear about the kind of choices we are making, because every act is not predetermined. Only the end result has been willed that this is the way that God wants it to be.

Of course there are some that he undoubtedly calls (maybe all of us for that matter) to fulfill certain responsibilities within the body of Christ—looking forward to the Kingdom of God, and His preparation then through that, is to prepare us for that. "I go and prepare a place for you." He spends the time that we're walking through the wilderness, as it were, preparing us for that. The children of Israel died because they chose to sin with the golden calf, to rebel with Korah against Moses, to commit fornication with the daughters of Moab. God didn't predestine that they do those things. That was their choice.

Now, if God permits something, we should not assume that God predestined it. If He permits something to happen in your life, you should not presume that He predestined it. He certainly did permit it. The Bible does not support such a view. At best, it only indicates that He decided to use such a circumstance to see what we would do with it—not that He willed it. God always has alternatives. If we chose to go one way rather than the other, well...He switches to plan B, and maybe we make a detour until He gets us back on track again. So we make it hard on ourselves.

Let's turn our thoughts back to ourselves and to our children again—to that analogy of calling our children out from a group of other children. Okay, when we call our children we usually have a specific reason in mind. Let's say it's to have them (he or she—whoever it happens to be) put their room in order. Okay, that is what you have predestined for them to do. There's no difference in principle between us and God. It is your will that they complete that assignment.

Now every step in putting the room in order is not predetermined by you. You leave that up to the child as to how the child is going to arrange the putting of that room in order—the arrangement or the order in which he will do it. Now you undoubtedly have in your mind an idea, a concept of the standard to which that child should put that room in order.

Now what happens with children? They may begin doing it. Some of them will just dawdle along and they'll get distracted by the radio or by the television. They'll decide to play for awhile—amuse themselves with some kind of a game or a book. They may work hurriedly, throwing everything unfolded into the drawers, piling things into a messy closet, meanwhile totally forgetting to make the bed or to dust the furniture.

Now, you didn't predestinate that they do it that way, did you? So you check up on them. You look in on them from time to time to see what they're doing, and what do you do? Some of the things they did might be acceptable, and others things are not so acceptable, and so you correct them. Now was that which was not acceptable predestined by you? Would you not have rather had your child do everything right, up to the standard that you envisioned? Well believe me brethren... God would like that too.

But He leaves that up to us to determine how, and how well we are going to walk along the way

to the Kingdom of God. And because He has willed that we be there, He is going to be with us constantly, looking in on us, correcting us, straightening it out, giving us orders, putting us back on the track, saying that this is acceptable while this is not. This is the way He wants it done, and hopefully we won't be like the Israelites, and refuse to do it... because, if we do, we may suffer the same fate and find that we are strewn along the way to the Kingdom of God.

In this analogy, you have predestined and willed an end—a goal that you want produced. But how it is done, and how quickly it is done largely depends on how the child responds to each step along the way. I hope that you understand that I have greatly simplified what in our lives is a long process, and what we are involved in is much more difficult than what I just described, but the overall working principles of will, predestination, and choice is what I want us to see—and it is not complicated at all.

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Here in this verse we are in the position of the child. The analogies have switched a little bit. Rather than being the parent (now God), we are now the child, receiving instruction from the parent. So the instruction from the parent is—"Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." It is the equivalent of saying to the child, "I want you to put your room in order and you have the right to decide how you're going to do it."

Now, "work out your salvation" does not mean, "work for salvation." There's a big difference there. If it meant, "work for salvation," then it would mean that we were earning salvation. It does not mean, "work for salvation." What it means is, take what God has given you to its logical conclusion.

God gave Israel liberty from Egyptian slavery, but that operation was not complete until they trekked across the wilderness and were in possession of the Promised Land. So what did they have to do? They had to walk there. They were working out the salvation that God made possible. Now verse 13 explains that God gives us both the desire to be motivated and the power to accomplish what is God's pleasure. Please make sure that we understand that. It is He who gives us the desire and the power to accomplish His will.

Again, we can go back to this analogy of the child. If the child really loves his mother and father—doesn't that put the desire in them to work and to get it done, to please mom and dad? Sure it does. Again, it's no different in principle. The only reason we love God is that He first loved us. That is so plain in the scriptures, and because He loves us, we begin to respond. How do we respond?

We yield to Him and do what he says. Another way that He gets us to respond and gives us the desire, is the fear element. Fear can work in the sense that we fear to get on their bad side, see, in the sense that we love them so much that we want them to love us even more, and so we want to please them. On the other hand there's the more negative aspect, where we're

afraid of the pain that they are able to inflict. But there's desire. Any way you want to look at it—there is desire.

Okay. God does that. He gives us the desire, but here God, in a way, goes way above and beyond what a parent is able to do. Here again the analogy does not quite break down, and that is, He also enables us to do what needs to be done. He does this by gifts of His spirit that a parent, in principle, also does. If the parent has not been so indulgent that they have never ever really required anything in the carrying out of the responsibility that the parent would like the child to do—that parent is not giving anything to that child except what amounts to abuse and hatred.

If the parent instills in that child a deep sense of responsibility, they are enabling that child to be empowered to do things. Believe me, God is not indulgent like we are. He never misses a trick to make sure that we turn into responsible beings in His image. It's also good to notice that He gives us the power to accomplish His will—not our pleasures. There's a big difference between the two.

Now fear and trembling is inserted there in verse 12, because of the uncertainties about what will be required of us in the future as we proceed upon the way. Let me give you an illustration right from the book of Philippians. Now when these people to whom Paul was writing in the book of Philippians took up the cross (remember that from Luke 14 and verse 26?), they didn't know for sure what lay ahead on the road for them.

Well, neither do we. Very frequently, when I am counseling somebody for baptism, I go through those verses there in Luke 14, verses 25, 26 and 27 so that people understand that I, John Ritenbaugh, do not know what lies ahead for the person who is requesting baptism. And where it says to "Take up your cross and follow Me,"—I don't know how heavy the burden of that cross is going to be.

Sometimes I will warn them that Jesus Christ may require their life. Now, are you going to be loyal enough to give up your life? Because He says right there in that section that "He who does not love Me more than these, (meaning father, mother, sister, brother) is not worthy of Me, and cannot be My disciple." So we have to bear our cross. Okay. These people to whom he was writing in Philippians—they were baptized under the same circumstances that we were. They didn't know what lay ahead either. So, in Philippians, chapter 1 and verse 30, Paul writes:

Philippians 1:30 Having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

In other words, they were going through the same kind of difficulties that Paul had gone through. (You know the kind of difficulties that Paul had gone through, in terms of persecution.) That's what he means by the term "conflict" there in verse 30. How about chapter 2 and verse 8?

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

That's what lay on the path of Jesus Christ. He literally had to bear His cross. How about verse 17? Paul says:

Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

What lay on the path (in carrying this cross) for Paul? Martyrdom. It came upon him. How about in verse 20, speaking of Timothy?

Philippians 2:20 For I have no man, likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

For Timothy, it was costly service and sacrifice to the church.

Philippians 2:27 For indeed he [Epaphroditus] was sick near unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Sickness, near unto death, lay on the path for Epaphroditus.

Is God fair in His dealings with man? Back to the analogy. Is a parent fair to charge his children with the responsibility to carry out responsibilities around the house? Now Paul approaches this subject in Romans 9 and in verses 19 through 24.

Romans 9:18-23 Therefore has he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens. You will say then unto me, Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will? No, but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.

Do you see that? We're getting back on the subject of predestination again.

Romans 9:24 Even us, whom he has called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Is God fair? Now this subject is dealt with in much more detail in the book of Job. That question is implied in virtually every question, or every statement of Job. "Why am I going through this?"

"What have I done to earn this?" "God is not fair in what He has done." And so Job constantly justifies himself. And indeed, brethren, he wasn't guilty. The lesson is that God has the right to do with anybody what He wants to do—even somebody as upright, as righteous as Job.

Job hadn't earned what he was going through, and so his friends kept telling him that he was a great sinner, and Job kept saying that he wasn't, and so he gave a recounting of all the good deeds that he gave to others. Job was an unusual man. God put him through that tremendous test. God was so confident of Job. He put Job into Satan's hands for Satan to do anything he wanted to do to him, short of death, to try to get Job to crack. Job didn't crack, but he sure wondered.

Those experiences are recorded so that we would understand that asking whether God is fair, is the wrong question, because God has every right to do what He does. The more basic question for us is, that doesn't God have the right to do as He pleases? That's the question. It's a very positive one. God created us. He gave us life.

Our lives are sustained by what He did and what He still does, and gives generously. In addition to that, it was He who released us from our spiritual bondage, forgave us through Christ's blood, gave us His spirit, and gave us access to Him. We belong to Him. Sometimes brethren, we seem to have little or no concept of what being a slave, or a servant to God (or as Paul says in Romans 6—a slave or servant of righteousness) translates into, in practical everyday life.

I would urge you to go back to that sermon by Harold Way, when he gave that whole sermon on slavery. Think of what you do know about slavery and the relationship between a master and slave. There was very good reason why the apostles used the word that indicates "slave,"—the Greek *doulos* (Strong's 1401). They strongly wanted those that they were writing to, to understand that our relationship with God is not only as His children, but in terms of seriousness of our responsibility to obey—the analogy is more likely to be that of a slave.

Now suppose that a master summons a slave to meet with him every seven days for instruction and fellowship—and the slave refuses, saying that he has something more important to do. I don't mean necessarily working for pay. Now suppose the master said the slave is to pay back ten percent of his increase, but the slave says that he first has to pay off other bills he ran up, but thinks that the master will understand. Yes, he understands that he has a child that is not first loyal to the one to whom he owes his life.

Let's broaden this out a bit. If you understand what I'm driving at here, you will understand what has happened inside the WCG in their headlong plunge into Protestantism. They have very slickly turned the table in the relationship, in making the slave the sovereign master by giving him the right to decide what is law and what isn't, and allowing him to change already established priorities.

So rather than deciding whether he, the slave, will obey what God has already established as law, and who it is that is sovereign, and who is the slave—is the point that Paul is making here in Romans 9. Understanding this, (and translating it into loving submission to God) is essential to the relationship with God—and that absolutely requires trusting Him. That absolutely requires faith.

Now we're going to tie together predestination and faith—Acts 13: 48 with this. There are two principles involved in this, and that is, whenever faith is going to be practical in terms of translating belief into everyday life, it hinges on these two factors.

(1) That we absolutely recognize the true God of the Bible as sovereign over His creation.

Those people who say they are worshipping God do not put that into practical application in their lives. They will say that they believe God is sovereign, but these two principles have to be tied together.

(2) Whether we believe that He is interested, and is personally and individually working in us—that is, in you.

If you don't have those two things, the exercise of faith is going to be, I believe, impossible—at least over any sustained period of time. Now in Romans 11, verse 28.

Romans 11:28-31 As concerning the gospel, they [meaning the Jews; those outside the church] are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. [In other words, God has willed it, and the gifts and callings in relation to Israel will be carried through. God has not forgotten them.] For as you in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

Now, what is he saying? He is saying that down the road God is going to be merciful to these people. Think of this in terms of predestination. You're beginning to see something very clear, that you have been predestined at this time to believe, to have faith, to have salvation. They have not. It's that simple. (I'm going to give you a verse that makes this very clear toward the end of the sermon.)

Romans 11:32-36 For God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Now this thing involving the gifts and callings applies to the church just as surely as it does to Israel, but brethren, it says in I Corinthians 15 in verses 22 and 23—each in his own order. So in order that we can trust Him, God has to give us the gift of faith so that we can say, "Yes,

Lord." This has interesting practical ramifications because, if He has given us the gift of faith, we are therefore without excuse if we say to Him we cannot overcome. We just read in Philippians 2: 13 that He gives us the power, and that power is through faith.

Now turn with me to Acts 18 and in verse 27. Again the central figure here is an evangelist. In this case it happens to be Apollos. He was a Jew, born in Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, and he came to Ephesus, a Gentile city, and he began to preach. Priscilla and Aquila found some things in him that were lacking, so they taught him more thoroughly—more perfectly.

Acts 18:27 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.

That agrees perfectly with Acts 13: 48. It agrees perfectly with Romans 11: 28-29. We believe only because God gave us the GIFT of faith to enable us to believe, which in turn EMPOWERS us to overcome. We have a perfect parallel here. Acts 13: 48 says, "As many as were ordained [appointed] to eternal life believed." Our believing is the consequence of, not the cause of, God's action in calling us. It is also clear that only a limited number are ordained to eternal life.

People used to snicker at Mr. Armstrong (I don't mean people in the church. I mean people outside the church.) when Mr. Armstrong used the simple terminology that God was practicing birth control. God was limiting His family. Mr. Armstrong was absolutely right! The people who were snickering didn't know what they were snickering about. God is limiting His family.

He is ordaining some to eternal life. The vast majority He is not ordaining. He is not giving them the grace to believe. He is not giving them the faith. Now let's connect this with Ephesians 2, and verse 3, because I want to tie this right back into Romans 9: 21.

Ephesians 2: 3 Among whom also we [Christians—those of us in the church] all had our conduct in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Now Romans 9: 21 says that we are all made from the same lump—the same mass of humanity, and out of that lump God ordains (He predestines) some to eternal life and to glorification, and others He does not. So we were taken out of the same mass of humanity that these unconverted people are still in. God called us, God summoned us, God predestined us, God ordained us—but He didn't do it for them, or they would believe the same way that we do. Therefore, we have to say that those He assigns to eternal life have faith; the others do not. It is completely and totally God's action.

Now let's go back to Romans 11 again, because there's an illustration here that Paul uses. It's right within the context of these things that I'm talking about, and he give this illustration to help these people, and you and me, to understand that it is God who acts to secure the

continuation, the successful conclusion of His work.

Romans 11:2-8 God has not cast away his people which he foreknew. [That was Israel] Don't you know what the scripture says of Elijah? how he makes intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed your prophets, and digged down your altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what says the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel has not obtained that which he seeks for; but the election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded. (According as it is written, God has given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear) unto this day.

Now what is important in terms of this sermon is again, not so much the incident. That is very interesting and it is evidence of some principles that I am extracting from this. Those words, "even so" in verse 5—they are there to draw out attention to God's calling and election. In Elijah's day, Israel was almost totally given over to idolatry. Remember him saying, "How long halt you between two opinions? If God be God, worship Him; and if Baal, worship him."

Elijah also had to do battle with the priests of Baal. Besides that, he had Jezebel as a very high-ranking and it seems personal enemy—so much so that he felt that he had to flee for his life. Elijah got all discouraged, feeling totally alone fighting this battle, he felt, in God's behalf. But God's answer to him was, "Elijah, you're not alone. I have reserved for myself seven thousand men." God wasn't restricted to working through Elijah. God had His own thing going on elsewhere that Elijah was totally unaware of. God didn't need Elijah's help at all.

Who those seven thousand were that God had raised up, I have no idea. It's not important. I bet you that was pretty humbling for Elijah. *"Oh, I'm by myself. No, I'm not by myself. God doesn't need me. I've been so zealous here. God, you owe me something. No, you don't owe me anything. I had better bow down to you. You're the one that's sovereign"* I tell you, that pricked Elijah's balloon in a hurry and put him back to where he could be used in a way that would be better for God's purpose.

Okay now. You see the point is, even so in Paul's day, and today, there is a remnant, according to the election of grace, that God has reserved for Himself. Again, it's not from anything that is in themselves, but it is solely by God's influence and agency. There is not one indication anywhere that God chose us because we already had faith, or any other quality, for that matter.

Now let's go to those scriptures in I Corinthians 1 again, and look at them in this light.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For you see your calling, [you remnants

you] how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has 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, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

If you want a parallel scripture of this, it's the Old Testament parallel of Deuteronomy 7. God said that He didn't choose Israel because they were high and mighty and great and the most of all people, and the strongest and the best. He chose them because they were the weakest. God follows that pattern. And so, two times here, in I Corinthians 1:27 and again in verse 28, it specifically says God has chosen. We didn't volunteer.

Notice how clearly He makes the point that He didn't choose us on the basis of any quality within us. "Not many wise; not many mighty; not many noble." Instead, God, with forethought, predestined the foolish, the base things, the despised—things that are nothing. What a rag-tag outfit we are! God certainly hasn't surrounded Himself with the elite in order to give Himself any kind of advantage in this battle against Satan, in this battle against the world, or in this battle against ourselves here.

Now remember how, in John 17:3 when Jesus was making that prayer, He described eternal life as knowing God, and we understand that to know indicates a deep, intimate love of God. Are you aware there are verses that show that there are some people that God doesn't know, and others that He does? It's just the flip side of the coin. In I Corinthians 8 and in verse 3, I'll give you just three quick examples here.

I Corinthians 8:3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

God knows that person. How about Galatians 4 and verse 9 where Paul wrote:

Galatians 4:9 But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage?

You can write this one down—Amos 3:2 where God says to Israel, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth."

What these verses are doing within their context, is that our love for Him is merely a responding to God's initiative in our relationship with Him. I want to show you a contrast that is very interesting, and this turns up in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord,

have we not prophesied in your name? and in your name have cast out devils? and in your name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, you that work iniquity.

That's just another way of saying, at this time, that "I never loved you. I never had an intimate relationship with you." Very interesting situation, but I hope that I am backing you into the corner to understand that we have absolutely nothing—no evidence, no proof, no Biblical scriptures—nothing, that we can turn to, to say that God called us for any other reason other than something that was within Himself.

I Peter 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;

Now look at this last couple of phrases.

I Peter 2:8 Even to them which stumble at the word, [the unconverted] being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

I told you at the beginning of this sermon that I was going to show you a verse that shows that God is sovereign in His creation, and that He is picking and choosing, and even as He has ordained, predestined some to be in His family...others He has appointed to stumble. Now notice, I did not say that He has appointed them to perish. Look at verse 9 in that light.

I Peter 2:9 But you [Christians] are a chosen generation.

Notice the contrast. You have not been appointed to stumble. God wants you in His kingdom. He has ordained you to eternal life. He has predestinated you to be there. All that remains for us is to work out our salvation, choosing to do His will.

I Peter 2:9-10 ...a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; [Yeah! Really peculiar, because the rest of the world isn't appointed and we stand out like sore thumbs.] that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you [summoned you, appointed you] out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Now if this scripture in verse 8 was all that we had, there would be a strong case that could be made that God has predestined some to be eternally lost in the lake of fire. But what this really means is that those who now stumble have simply been passed over at this time. They are appointed to fill a different part in God's scheme of the things that He is working out. Do we not know of the second resurrection?

There are scriptures that say that God is not willing that any should perish, that each is in his own order. There are a tremendous number of scriptures saying that this is not the only day of salvation. We've got Revelation 20 and the second resurrection; Ezekiel 37; Zechariah 14; Matthew 11 and 12; Isaiah 2; Micah 4; Romans 9 through 11; but we must know, and know that we know, that there is no cause outside of God's own will that moved Him to make us the special object of His love now.

Again, remember human nature always seeks some motive within ourselves that we think has caused God (moved Him) to pick and choose us. People will say things like, "I've always loved God." Now how can human nature say that, when the first thing that we have to do is repent—repent of breaking God's law, and the Bible describes love as the keeping of God's law? So we have to repent of not loving Him? I'll tell you, if we were really loving Him, we wouldn't have to repent. See, that's a lie when you hear people say that they have always loved God.

I Peter 1:18 Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conduct received by tradition from your fathers.

Brethren, what we loved was a concept of God given by tradition. It was something that we had input into devising, and if the reality is truly acknowledged, it—that god that we were seeking, that god that we loved—it was an idol (i-d-o-l) of our own devising. In principle, it was no different from the rank bowing down before a statue, as the ancient pagans did.

Now, the God of the Bible reveals in His word that not one single person has even known Him, until God chose to reveal Himself, and that nobody knows what to look for until God has done the revelation. He says, "There is none that seeks God. No, not one." Again, human nature likes to think of itself as having certain virtues. It will say we were generous, we were kind, we were good-tempered or sincere, and that God saw us and He said that He wanted us on His side.

Again, there is no support for that in the scriptures. Who's telling the truth? God, who says that "There's none good; no, not one," or these who say those things? Now this is not to deny that there are people with virtuous qualities—but that is not the reason why God called them. That reason, or those reasons, are hidden inside God himself. Some people would also like to say that they have always believed God. But what they believed was this idol, which was a syncretistic god devised of Biblical truth and paganism.

Now, if what these people say is true, then what does that do with Acts 18:27? We believe, because it's been given. Faith is God's gift. We have what we have only because we were the object of His choice. He chose the ones He did simply because he chose them, and we can go no further than that. We have no claim to any praise in this regard. Rather, it should humble us—actually stun us in overflowing praise, gratitude and obedience in as much enthusiasm and zeal as we can muster—that so much has been given for so little, and so undeserving to receive it.

Now brethren, humility begins when we have a proper recognition of who and what we are in relation to the sovereign Creator. In addition to that, this tends to fine-tune our relationship to

fellow man—both called and uncalled alike. Humility is shown by the choices we make, and our choices will largely be determined by our willing recognition of the immense value of, and the love of God's revelation of Himself to us.