

How to Talk about Election

2 Peter 1:10-11

Some people talk about election as if it is an argument to be won. A theological argument, a doctrinal point that they want to make. And they talk about it like the whole purpose is to win that argument. That way, they show themselves smarter and more advanced in their doctrinal understanding. That way, by proving other people wrong, they can think more highly of themselves, and think more highly of their own doctrinal position. As if that's the goal.

Somewhat related to that, some people talk about election as if it is a way to prove that they are reformed. As if that's the goal. They talk, they argue, they seek to teach, all with the goal of making someone else reformed, or of criticizing them for not being reformed, or reformed enough. As if that's the goal.

Some people talk about it without any practical emphasis, it's all just theoretical. It's all just doctrinal, or merely intellectual, and all the practical and ordinary questions that might arise are ignored.

Clearly, all these people I am talking about have a very large problem with pride, because they are using the doctrine of election as a pedestal upon which they can stand in order to make themselves look important. Or smart. Or more reformed than you.

And if you haven't figured it out yet, I'm not proposing that any of those ways are the right way to talk about election. Quite to the contrary, they are all wrong. Completely wrong. And that approach turns away a lot of people, doesn't it? People typically don't like to be made to feel stupid. That's not the best way to

teach people or to help them learn. People typically don't like to be confronted in an argumentative style, and certainly not one in which pride produces a condescension which ruins the whole message that you are communicating. If you are contentious and argumentative, even to the point of anger or extreme defensiveness, then you aren't likely to be able to teach anyone else successfully. And you will turn them off.

Some people go to the other extreme, and in order not to be contentious, in order not to turn people off, they simply don't talk about election at all! As it was so bluntly said to me once, "We wouldn't want to say something that would make someone leave the church." So we don't say anything at all.

But the problem with that is that it is in the Bible! And I can tell you honestly, that when I was first introduced to the whole doctrine of election, it didn't seem right to me. It was different from anything I had even been taught. But I read it in the Bible. So I chose to believe it, because my commitment of faith was to believe whatever is taught in the Bible. And I could read,

Eph. 1:4 "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

That's the doctrine of election. It sometimes goes by the name, predestination. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." And I could read what Paul wrote to the Romans,

Rom. 9:10 "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall

serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”

So I chose to believe it. Then I set out to understand it. And I learned how to talk about it. I think the Bible has two ways in which we should talk about election. The first is what is so obvious in Ephesians 1. It’s a doxology. Verse 3 obviously comes just before verse 4.

v.3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

So, whatever election means, it should cause you to give praise and glory to God for his love! And if you are able to do that, I think you understand election quite well. The awareness and recognition that God chose me, before the foundation of the world, that he chose to adopt me to be his child, that causes me to give him all the praise for that great work of salvation which he has accomplished in my life. “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.” Election is the greatest of those great blessings.

That’s the first way the Bible talks about election. But when many people hear the doctrine of election, they think, so I can live however I want. If God elected me, as an act of his grace, with no reference to my life or my good works, it doesn’t matter what I do. That’s how many people respond. And Paul answers that question so definitely, doesn’t he?

Rom. 6:1 “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not!”

If election is true, then it doesn’t matter how I live. That’s the wrong response.

Others struggle with the question, “How can I know if I’m elect?” Perhaps I should call that a second way that people talk about election. Perhaps they expect some particular personal experience. Perhaps they wrestle with not knowing how that can be proven? How can they know? Maybe their faith is counterfeit. Maybe God didn’t choose them, so what’s the use in making a profession of faith to believe in Jesus. And maybe, because they still struggle with sin, maybe that’s evidence they aren’t elect. Or maybe, because it seems that God has not or does not answer their prayers, maybe that is evidence they are not elect. Election then becomes a doctrine that fills them with doubt, with seemingly unanswerable questions.

But again, that’s NOT how the Bible talks about election.

So in our text today, we see a third way. And it might surprise you. If it does, I hope you will come to a greater understanding of election today. This correct and proper way to talk about election is one in which we gain confidence and encouragement in the whole concept of election, but not in a way that causes you to be careless or negligent in how you live your life. Just look at what Peter writes,

v.10-11

He’s writing to give encouragement, joyful encouragement. And he does so by challenging us to “make our election sure...” Make your election evident. Confirm your election, by adding to your faith those seven virtues we studied last week.

v.5-7

But don’t ever think that means works-salvation, or works-righteousness. Don’t ever think that call to add to your faith is some form of legalism that ignores or contradicts the promise of the gospel. Just go back to,

So we have great and precious promises given to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And with those promises as the foundation of our faith, work out your faith. Work out your salvation, as Paul would put it in Philippians 2. Add to your faith, as Peter puts it here. And as that happens, as God works in you to enable you add these things to your faith, then that is the evidence, that is the confidence and assurance, that God has, first of all, chosen you to be his beloved son or daughter.

And to express that positively, with much encouragement, Paul talks about election this same way when he writes to the Thessalonians,

1 Thes. 1:2 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”

Here’s the bottom line, if the gospel comes to you with power, if the gospel comes to you and changes your life, then there is only one explanation. God has chosen you in Christ, even before the foundation of the world. So praise God for his grace. And heed this encouragement to “make your call and election sure.”

In other words, don’t presume upon God’s grace by living in careless disregard for his laws. And don’t distress yourself by wondering if God has called you in the first place. Instead, hear the gospel, believe the promise of the gospel, and then apply it to your life as a testimony of your thanksgiving and gratitude to God.

“...Giving all diligence, add to your faith.” “...Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.” That’s how you should talk about election.

In that context, then, let’s study more deeply how Peter talks about election, beginning with,

I. A DEFINITION OF YOUR SALVATION.

And that definition is not a focus upon “your decision.” The emphasis is not your receiving or your accepting Christ. No, there is something much more fundamental about the nature of salvation. Namely, your call, or calling. Verse 10. And your election. Not those things you have done, but those things God has done. that’s a definition of your salvation, what God has done. First,

A. Your calling.

This calling is a technical word describing how and when that election is actually applied to you. It is God’s calling. It is the work of his Holy Spirit to change your hearts and to enable you to receive Jesus Christ by faith. God’s calling is his work of making you born again. It is his work of regeneration--making you alive when you were dead. And God does it. Salvation is a work of God.

“Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”

So let’s do a little very basic biblical word study. And I’ll read a long list of verses to demonstrate to you how pervasive this idea of calling is in the Bible. Your salvation is defined in terms of God’s calling.

Eph. 1:18 "...that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Eph. 4:1 "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling."

2 Thes. 1:11 "Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power."

2 Tim. 1:8 "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us [called us] and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."

Heb. 3:1 "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus."

1 Thes. 2:12 "...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

Rom. 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom

He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Beloved, I am just beginning. There are many, many more references with this idea of calling as the definitive description of our salvation. And then the related idea of,

B. Your election.

v.10

1 Thes. 1:4 "...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God."

Rom. 9:11 "...[for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls]."

Rom. 11:5 "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work."

Election of grace. Those ideas go together. If you have one, you have the other.

Then there are the references to God's people as the elect.

Rom. 8:33 "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies."

1 Peter 1:1 "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling

of the blood of Jesus Christ.’

Col. 3:12 “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...”

Reference after reference in the Bible to the idea of election. The idea of God’s choice, God’s choosing. If you are a Christian, it is because God has chosen you, as Paul writes in,

Eph. 1:4 “...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

That is the very definition of your salvation. And that definition is the very foundation for your responsibilities as a Christian. So now we look at,

II. A DESCRIPTION OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES.

Let me emphasize that the Bible consistently links responsibilities with the whole idea of election. The Bible consistently identifies duties that accompany and grow out the doctrines of grace. So don’t ever think when you hear the word “election” or even “predestination” that the consequence of those doctrines produces a careless approach to godly living.

Just the opposite. As I read,

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

1 Thes. 2:12 “...that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

And most clearly, in our text this morning, beginning with that word “therefore” again. “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent.” And as we studied last week from verse 5, “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence...” Because of the exceedingly great and precious promises of the gospel, “therefore, brethren, be even more diligent.”

You cannot escape it. In fact, it lies at the very heart of gospel preaching. “Therefore...” Therefore, what?

A. The call of diligence in walking with the Lord.

The Bible never lets you neglect this calling, this exhortation. Peter exhorts you to produce the works which prove that your faith is not dead! That’s what verse 10 is all about.

The emphasis of those words is upon our effort. “Make every effort” to make your calling and election sure. Work very hard at it. Work diligently, and don’t delay. The word refers to a sense of urgency. Make haste. Exert yourself as fully and as faithfully as you possibly can.

There is nothing passive there. Nothing about waiting for God to do something so that you feel like being motivated, as if your sanctification is passive. No, beloved, not at all. Don’t miss this imperative words, these commands and exhortations. On the basis of the promises of the gospel which you receive by faith, you are exhorted in the strongest possible language to work hard in your walk with the Lord.

How hard?

Col. 3:5 “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Therefore...Put to death those temptations that wage war with your soul. Put to death the sinful desires of your flesh. That takes diligence!

Rom. 6:12 “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”

Beloved, there is no room in biblical doctrine for any sense of complacency when it comes to your living the Christian life, walking worthy of the calling you have received. Remember the illustrations of hard work I mentioned last week from 2 Timothy 2, the soldier, the athlete, the farmer.

2 Tim. 2:3 “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.”

People of God, the gospel of the grace of God must be preached plainly and clearly. You are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Faith is the alone instrument by which you are justified. But you are called upon to exert diligence in living so that your faith is not alone! Instead, your faith produces works. Your faith produces godliness, and all those things we identified last week.

In fact, your actual life is what demonstrates the reality of your faith. And that’s what Peter identifies here,

B. The call of demonstrating the reality of your faith.

v.10 “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.”

Make your calling and election sure. Now what does that mean? Literally, make it firm. Certain. Sure. The idea is, demonstrate the reality of it. Certify your calling and election. Attest to it. Your life is to be the evidence of your calling and election. Your life is the guarantee, the validation, that you have been chosen by God.

So how do you know who the elect are? They show it! I read earlier,

1 Thes. 1:4 “...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. 5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.”

How do you know if someone is one of the elect? How do you know if you are one of the elect? How can you know if you have been chosen by God? By identifying the fruit. Godliness in life, practical, day in and day out obedience, godliness is the outward proof of election. The power of gospel transforms their life! That’s how. Not by mere words. Not by reciting some doctrinal formulations or catechism answers, as accurate and biblical as those responses might be. Not by words, but by works. Paul says, we know you are among the elect, chosen by God, because when you heard the gospel, it changed your life!

So beloved, make your call and election sure. Be diligent to

make your call and election evident in your lives, demonstrating the power of God which is at work within you.

James 2:18 “But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Be diligent, work hard to show your faith that way.

Phil. 2:12 “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Then what? That’s easy. “You will never stumble.” And that is one of,

III. THE BLESSINGS OF DILIGENCE.

The rewards. The benefits. Here,

A. The blessing of protection against stumbling.

v.10b “...for if you do these things you will never stumble.”

Godliness is the only protection against stumbling. If you are working hard to grow in godliness, if you are working hard to possess those qualities of goodness and knowledge and self-control in increasing measure, then you will be protected against falling into sin. You will remain strong and resist temptation.

Practical, daily, down-to-earth godliness is your best protection against falling into sin. God promises you that blessing.

Now, be assured, your ultimate confidence is in God’s grace to keep you and preserve you. He who began a good work in you will finish it! But the means by which he preserves you includes this call to your own exercise of diligence.

Look at the encouragement Peter gives for all of this in verse 11, with the promise of,

B. The blessing of the assurance of heaven.

v.11

Does that mean that you earn that entrance by your own works? No. No, no, no. Not at all. You don’t earn anything. Christ earned all that had to be earned, and he did it for you, in your place.

Does that mean that since Christ earned your salvation for you, you don’t have to be diligent about how you live? No, again. No, no, no. Not at all. That’s the whole point. You who, by faith, trust that God will preserve you and grant you entrance into heaven as the gift of his grace, here is the path upon which God, by his grace, directs you to live.

Here is the entrance way to heaven. Here is the secret passage into heaven. Just follow the yellow brick road, the road marked obedience. The road marked godliness. The road marked good works. The road marked holiness, “holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” That is the path through which we enter the kingdom of God.

And that is the blessing of diligence. The idea is assurance and certainty. You will enter the kingdom of God. You will persevere. And notice that God still receives all the praise, for the meaning of this verse is that God will lead you into his kingdom by supplying you richly with new graces. God responds to your faithfulness, and will give you entrance into his kingdom with the riches of great triumph. And with the future tense here, I believe the emphasis is upon the future glory you will have upon our death, when you enter that eternal kingdom made perfect in

holiness.

And so, you can have confidence and assurance of our eternal life. You can be sure of your eternal destiny. You can know for certain that God has included you in his eternal kingdom in Jesus Christ. You can know all of that, if there is in your life a deep and genuine pursuit of godliness.

Let me end by reading this whole section which we have studied these past four sermons. Let me read the verses together, and leave you with the sense of having received these marvelous words from the apostle yourself.

v.1-11