



UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Earl M. Blackburn

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WHEN RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD and properly taught, unconditional election is a very practical and encouraging doctrine. As to its being declared and taught in the Bible, there is no doubt; but the way men expound this truth is often fuel for the fire. In our day, the greater part of God's people have been schooled in the contrary doctrine of Arminianism and the truth of election must be presented to them in loving patience and tender humble wisdom, in the Spirit of Him who will not break the bruised reed.

The doctrine of election will cause the believer to press on even when the obstacles seem insurmountable. When all hope is gone, the truth of God's electing love will cause him, like Abraham of old, to believe in hope (Rom. 4:18). Worship will spring up in the heart when God's sovereign choosing is contemplated. A desire for holiness and obedience is produced and sin is mortified in the saint when his innermost being is filled with the truth of election. Almost a hundred years ago, C. H. Spurgeon preached a message entitled, "The Doctrines of Grace Do Not Lead to Sin." He did this to show that the truth of election, received in the heart, will purify a child of God. Rather than causing one to be proud and haughty, this truth will create humility and meekness. Boasting will be excluded and pride abased! The value and helpfulness of this doctrine cannot be measured. Having said this, let us look at four aspects of unconditional election.

I. THE NATURE OF ELECTION

1. ELECTION IS THE WORK OF GOD FROM ETERNITY (Eph. 1:4, 5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). God's election did not come into effect after we chose Christ, but before we chose Christ. God's choice of us preceded our choice of Him and His choice was before the foundation of the world. According to Revelation 17:8, the Lamb's Book of Life was written before time began.

2. ELECTION IS SOVEREIGN AND UNCONDITIONAL. God did not choose sinners because He saw they would repent and believe (foreseen faith) or in response to any other work they would do; instead He chose sinners to salvation according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:5 & 2:8, 9; Rom. 9:11). 1 Peter 1:2 points out that election was "unto" obedience, not because of some act(s) of obedience on the part of sinners.

3. ELECTION CONCERNS INDIVIDUALS (Acts 13'48; Rom. 9:11 ff.). Paul says to the believers in Thessalonica, "knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God," (1 Thess. 1:4).

4. THE FINAL AIM OF ELECTION IS GOD'S GLORY AND IT IS THE WORK OF HIS DELIGHT (Eph. 1=4-6). God chose some and passed by others according to His own good pleasure, so that at the last He alone would be glorified (see 1 Cor. 1:30, 31).

5. IT IS JUST (Rom. 9:16, 20, 21). All that the infinitely holy God of heaven and earth does is just and good. While men in their partiality would choose people because of social status, position, economic state, appearance, etc., God was not affected by any of these considerations. He did not choose individuals to be recipients of His salvation because of any good or because of any evil He saw in them. He was totally just in His election.

6. ELECTION IS NOT LIMITED TO JEWS OR TO ANY OTHER PARTICULAR NATIONALITY, but extends to people of every race, tribe and language (Rom. 9:24). Men may be proud of race, face, place, and grace (as the jews were), but these things gain no favor with the Almighty. He has His chosen ones in every class and stratum of society, from every nation (Rev. 5=9).

7. THE SOVEREIGN CHOOSING OF SPECIFIC, UNWORTHY SINNERS TO SALVATION BY GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE AND EFFECTUAL. The Lord does not add to or delete from His chosen. Their number was immutably fixed in eternity past. All of the elect shall be saved and shall enter into glory at last (Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Tim. 2:19). As the Saviour has said, "This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." (John 6:39).

8. THIS DOCTRINE WAS TAUGHT NOT ONLY BY PAUL THE APOSTLE, BUT BY THE LORD JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF. As the Savior began His ministry, one of the first sermons He preached was in the synagogue in Nazareth (see Luke 4:16-30). Jesus told of how God passed by all of the widows in Israel during Elijah's day and sent the prophet to a heathen widow in Zarephath (v. 26). What is that if it is not election? It is God passing by a multitude and showing grace and favor to the most undeserving and unworthy! Christ continues to expound the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God in the next verse (v. 27) when He declares there were "many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." Again Christ illustrates the fact that God passes by many to show mercy to one! What was the result of

the Lord's teaching on the subject of election? Did the people rejoice? Did they respond favorably? Verses 28 and 29 tell us they "were filled with wrath" and sought to kill Him. That same type of response is often encountered today when God's men and people faithfully proclaim the truth. The spirit that is filled with anger and wrath at the doctrine of election is not the Spirit of Christ, but of the rebellious human heart. Our Lord taught election in other sections of Scripture also (see Matt. 11:25-27; John 6:37, 39 & 15:16, 19). One must not try to set Christ against Paul or vice versa; Paul preached that which he received from Christ his Redeemer. As C. H. Spurgeon once said, "It is not novelty, then, that I am preaching; no new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines that are called by nickname, Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus."

9. ELECTION BECOMES EVIDENT IN TIME AND AFFECTS ALL PHASES OF A BELIEVER'S LIFE. The believers in the church at Thessalonica were told to know and be assured of their election of God (1 Thess. 1:4). Just as individuals were chosen in eternity past to be saved, they shall in time be called to receive that salvation (2 Thess. 2:13, 14), which shall change and affect every aspect of their lives. This is clearly seen in Paul's injunction to the Colossians "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, ..." (Col. 3:12-4:6). Areas which would be wrought upon by God's electing grace were: the believer's heart and mind before God, his relationship with his fellow man and brethren, his marriage and family, and his work. Every sphere of life is covered. It must be noted that holiness is a mark of all of God's elect, blood washed people. If there is no holiness, there is no salvation, nor election! That is why Peter tells us to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

10. LASTLY, AS TO THE NATURE OF ELECTION, IT IS NOT ONLY A CHOOSING UNTO SALVATION, BUT ALSO TO VOCATION AND SERVICE. Christ chose twelve apostles (John 6:70), and Paul was chosen into special service (Acts 9:15, 16 & 17:26).

II. THE HISTORICAL POSITION OF BAPTISTS ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

The lines have fallen unto Baptists in pleasant places; we have a goodly heritage. We are not people of today, but of yesterday. Our forefathers blazed a bright and glorious path for us to follow. One of the main tenets of Baptists has always been that the Bible is our only source of faith and practice. Baptists said that if the Bible

taught something then it must be believed; likewise, if the Scriptures condemned something, it must be opposed. With that attitude, as they studied the inerrant Word of God, they embraced and preached the doctrine of election.

Our forefathers' beliefs were not hidden in a corner, but were put into print for all men to see. Their declarations of faith and practice have been preserved for us and for our instruction. We do not have to speculate as to what they believed. They were forthright and plain, and one of the reasons for this was to teach their posterity after them. Let us look at what our forebears believed about election.

The Waldenses, who were forerunners to modern day Baptists, met in Switzerland in 1120 A. D. and drew up a short confession of faith. The confession contained articles on such matters as the Bible as the only rule of faith and duty, the moral inability of man, the doctrine of two church ordinances only (namely baptism of believers and the Lord's Supper) and among other things, the doctrine of election unto eternal life. Concerning election unto eternal life, the Waldensian confession stated:

“God saves from corruption and damnation those whom He has chosen from the foundation of the world, not from any disposition, faith or holiness that He foresaw in them, but by His mere mercy in Christ Jesus His Son, passing by all the rest according to the irreprehensible [irreproachable, blameless] reason of His own free will and justice.”

This was approximately 400 years before the Reformation, which began in the early 16th century.

Probably the most famous Baptist confession is the second London or the 1689 Confession of Faith. It was drawn up by 37 Baptist pastors and was formally published in 1689. I personally think “the 1689” is the best statement of biblical and baptistic truths.

In the third chapter, concerning God's decree, we find stated in paragraphs three through six, the following:

“3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.

(1 Tim. 5:21; Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:5, 6; Rom. 9:22, 23; Jude 4)

4. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

(2 Tim. 2:19, John 13:18)

5. Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving Him thereunto.

(Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Thess. 5:9; Rom. 9:13, 16; Eph. 2:5, 12)

6. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so He hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto; wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ, by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation; neither are any other redeemed by Christ, or effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

(1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Thess. 5:9, 10; Rom. 8:30; 1 Pet. 1:5; John 10:26, 1709, & 6:24)”

In 1833 the Baptists in the northern part of the United States issued the New Hampshire Declaration of Faith. Its ninth article, entitled “Of God’s Purpose of Grace,” says:

“We believe that Election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which He graciously regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man, it comprehends all the means in connection with the end; that it is a most glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, being infinitely free, wise, holy and unchangeable; that it utterly excludes boasting, and promotes humility, love, prayer, praise, trust in God, and active imitation of His free mercy; that it encourages the use of means in the highest degree; that it may be ascertained by its effects in all who truly believed the gospel; that it is the foundation of Christian assurance; and that to ascertain it with regard to ourselves demands and deserves the utmost diligence.”

Some of the proof texts used in the New Hampshire Declaration for their article on election are: 2 Timothy 1:8, 9; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14; Acts 13:48; Exodus 33:18, 19 (cf. Romans 9:10-23); James 1:17; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Timothy 2:10.

This is the same Declaration the Southern Baptist Convention adopted in 1925. Though most of the Southern Baptists later departed from this biblical truth, there is today a genuine reformation among them in the U.S., in turning back to Calvinism or the doctrines of grace. A book written by Robert B. Selph and titled, "Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election" is most helpful and useful in pointing Baptists back to their historic faith. As the title suggests, the book addresses where Southern Baptists stood historically on election; and is replete with relevant application for today's scene. (If you would like to purchase a copy, contact Sprinkle Publications, P.O. Box 1094, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, U.S.A.).

Time and space will not allow me to enlarge upon famous Baptists of yesteryear who held tenaciously to election. Men such as John Bunyan, Andrew Fuller, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and C. H. Spurgeon were all lovers and upholders of this blessed doctrine. If Baptists today are to be consistent with the majority of Baptists of the past, they must believe and faithfully preach the doctrine of unconditional election. Doctrinal fuzziness and soft pedaled theology will not do in a world that is captive to sin. The churches must put forth the triumphant cross work of Christ, and without a proper understanding of election the Cross loses its full meaning; a weak, impotent gospel message cannot deliver sinners bound in their transgressions nor strengthen the saints in their warfare. J. I. Packer comes directly to the point when he says, "It cannot be overemphasized that we have not seen the full meaning of the cross till we have seen it as the center of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation." If we Baptists are to return to the glory and blessing of our heritage, we must return to the biblical truth of election.

III. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS DOCTRINE?

The benefits of this teaching for the believer are numerous. They encompass the whole spectrum of Christian experience. When one properly comprehends unconditional election, it will produce a deep reverence and admiration of the triune God (Rom. 11:33-36). Praise, thanksgiving, and worship will spring from a heart of love. Election teaches us why we love Christ (1 John 4:19), and love begets love. Humility is promoted in our minds and hearts as we consider that

God passed by others and set His affections on us. Why did He do so? We could have easily been vessels of wrath; instead, we are objects of mercy. This thought will bend our knees, humble our hearts, and turn us from sin.

Another benefit of election is assurance. If God has predestinated, called, and justified us, we know He shall also glorify us. If He has justified us freely by His grace, the God of sovereign justice will not bring a charge against us, His elect. If the righteous God loved us eternally before we were born or born again, He surely will not stop loving us if we find ourselves falling after a fierce struggle with remaining sin. Nothing can separate us from the love of God who has proven Himself to be for us by choosing us in Christ to be “holy and without blame before Him in love,” (see Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:4). He who also began a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6).

I cannot close this section without saying that election also brings the sweetest peace and consolation. As God’s sheep realize their salvation is in the hands of the all-wise, merciful Redeemer, who has power to cast out and yet has received them, their inner most being overflows with glorious peace.

IV. THE IMPETUS THIS DOCTRINE GIVES TO EVANGELISM AND MISSION

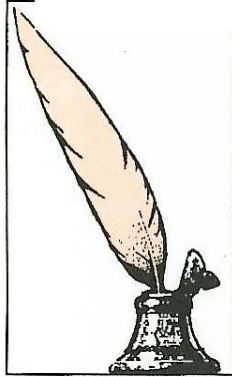
Many opponents of the doctrine of election have stated that if they believed in unconditional election, they would never preach the gospel to the lost nor try to lead sinners to Christ. This mind-set reveals a true ignorance of Scripture. One who thinks in this manner has approached the Word of God with his own preconceived ideas about election rather than submitting himself to what God has taught through His prophets, His Son, and His apostles.

God has not only ordained the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), but He has ordained the means by which the end will be brought to pass. The elect shall be saved (indeed they must be saved) and they cannot be saved without hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). The means that God has appointed for the salvation of sinners are preaching, teaching, witnessing, praying, and holy living. As God’s people do these things, God by His Spirit will draw the elect to repentance and faith in Christ.

Election does not discourage evangelism and missions in any way; rather it encourages both. The Christian witness and church planter can go forth with confidence knowing that a multitude of sinners shall be saved and added to the fold of which Christ spoke (John 10:16). The Lord encouraged Paul, while Paul was laboring in Corinth, by assuring the apostle that there were many elect people in the city (Acts 18:9-11). It is no wonder that we see Paul striving to preach the gospel where Christ was not named (Rom. 15:20) and enduring “all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Tim. 2:10). Contrary to Arminian thought, election prompts fervent and biblical evangelism. Do I need to mention that some of the greatest evangelists and missionaries since the days of the apostles firmly held to the doctrine of election? Men such as John Calvin, John Knox, George Whitefield, Daniel Rowlands, Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, Samuel Zwemer and others were zealous lovers of this blessed truth. When one properly understands election, he too will “endure all things for the sake of the elect” and will become a fiery and bold witness for Christ.

In conclusion, while there are many things one might not understand concerning this high mystery of election, it cannot be rejected. This truth must be believed, loved, and preached, because it is plainly and forcefully revealed in God’s inerrant Word, the Holy Bible.

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approved unto God”
2 Timothy 2:15*

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