

Election: A Use of the Means

Chapter One/Lesson 11

Head One: Article 15 & 16

Election: Leave Them Alone

Notes

Article 15 stresses the unmerited grace of election by reminding us once again how it is that the sinner becomes elect. Notice the passive nature of the language of our Canons: "*but some only are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God, out of his sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but leaving them in his just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of his justice".*

Do we really see what this Article is saying?!

We tend to think that reprobation is like election in every way, *except the destination*. This, however, according to our beloved Canons, and more importantly the Scriptures, is not the case. Election is *limited* (God choosing), *positive* (God affirming) and *active* (God working). Reprobation is *limited* (God passing), *negative* (God judging) and *passive* (God leaving). It is not correct to say that "*God elects individuals to hell*" or that "*God predestines some people for heaven, and predestines other people to damnation.*" Let us scrub this language from our vocabulary. The use of election and predestination in the Bible are always positive. We read the words "*predestinate, or predestinated*" 4 times in the Bible, "*elect, or election*" 27 times, and "*chosen or choose*" 67 times. In every case, the use is *limited, positive* and *active*. There is not a single instance where election refers to reprobation or predestination. Reprobation is always spoke of passively.

Romans 1:28 *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind"* (See also Rom. 2:18, 26, 28; Eph. 4:19; Psalm 81:12). Election is a one-way street that highlights God's mercy and grace. People go to heaven because of grace, to hell because of works.

Let us try to illustrate this. You got the supermarket at 10:59 pm to buy one peach. The store has marked that batch of peaches as expired at the end of the business day. You know this will happen, yet, for your own good pleasure, you choose one peach. Is it right to say that in choosing it, you are *choosing* the others for the garbage? No, they are tossed out because they are marked expired, not because you did not choose them. Of course, there is a limit to this analogy; God knows whom He did not choose before He made them, and yet He made them still. This is forcefully illustrated in Revelation which states in chapters 13 and 17 that people worshipped the Beast because their *"names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world"*. Notice, they are reprobate because their names were not written. Compare this with Rev. 21:27 which states that the elect's names *"were written in the book of life"*. "Not written" = passive, "written" = active.

This brings us to our Article's most forceful statement, *"And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy)." Our Forefathers were keying in on the charges Arminians were making against election; that God must then be the author of sin. This charge our Fathers avoided by rightly stating the passiveness of God in reprobation.*

A very few in the Reformed camp, however, come very close to the line of making God the author of sin, if not crossing it. They will argue that the cause of the cause is the cause of the effect. But here is where man's philosophy and man's logic try and peer into the secrets of the mind of God. Our wisest human philosophies may be the cause of man's ignorance. If God's ways are past finding out (Rom. 11:33), is this not most clearly demonstrated in the example of the origin of sin? Let us be settled on a few things before we move on; God is not the author of sin. The fall took place by divine permission, but not by divine action. God decreed to allow it but did not make man do it. God elects some to everlasting life, and others, He leaves in their original condemnation. Let us leave God's unrevealed mysteries alone and forsaken human wisdom.

Questions for Further Study

Notes

1. How do we square Romans 9 with God's passiveness in reprobation?

2. Where did sin come from?

3. Is the Bible always logical?

4. Is the cause of the cause is the cause of the effect?

Election: A Use of the Means

Article 16 becomes much more pastoral in its words. To this point, the forceful doctrine of election is being stated and restated theologically. It ought to shine a light upon, and give comfort to the souls of the redeemed. But what of those who, in light of the beautiful doctrine of election, "do not yet experience a lively faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience"? Perhaps this describes you, or me? What are we to do when no sensible comfort can be felt in our own heart "that I am elect"? So many are troubled, even sleeplessly so, about this question. Thankfully our Canons feel the barrier of many, and address it.

We may wish to conclude the since I have not experienced "*a lively faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul*", *that we are not elect. This Article says don't conclude such. They "ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to rank themselves among the reprobate"*. Is this a comfort to you? Why would they write this?

The reason this is written for us is plain, we can't possibly know of our reprobation until we stand before God. Would we say to an unbeliever, "You must find out your election first, then believe"? I hope not. Election is a secret that is only whispered to the believing, trusting, redeemed heart. It would be foolish to say that we can know of our election before we believe. So it is also a secret whom the reprobate are. Since when did God open His secret counsel to any unbelieving heart? Brakel says, "*No man can know whether he is a reprobate because God has not revealed this in His Word. The Lord does not have such intimate communion with the ungodly that He would make this known to them in an extraordinary way*" (Vol. 1, p. 246).

You can not, you must not conclude you are among the reprobate so long as there is air in your lungs!

There are 4 things in this article that are pointed to, to encourage the troubled heart:

- 1. Diligently persist in the use of the means which God hath appointed.**
- 2. Devoutly and humbly to wait for a season of richer grace.**
- 3. Seriously desire to be turned to God.**
- 4. [Desire] to be delivered from the body of death.**

Are you troubled soul regarding your election? Do any of these things describe you?

There are a few ways of answering this:

First, "I am troubled about my election, but I don't care much about any of these things". Then your answer is clear, you have no interest in Christ at this time. You are still dead in trespasses and sins and must be born again. Far too often when I hear from people that they are troubled about their election, but do not attend the means, or desire to be turned, or wait for a season of grace, they are awakened to nothing more than a fear of hell, and have not yet looked to Christ for their soul's salvation. It is fear of punishment, not a desire for holiness that motivated them.

Second, some will say in their heart of hearts, these things I do desire, and hope to experience in my life. They are most diligent in attending the means, they do desire to be turned to God, and they wait often in their hearts for grace to be revealed to their souls. Thomas Watson would say, "That is faith in the bud, but not the flower." In other words, they have already entered the life of faith, and are elect, though they do not see it yet.

It will please the Lord, to reveal His adoption to them at His appointed time. These are fewer in number among us, but do live in the Church of Christ.

Lastly, there are the rest of us. We look at this list and say, "I think I see something of these things, but if they are there at all, they are weak and about to die. I do not listen attentively, and only sometimes is my heart warmed by the preaching. I wait on God and desire to be turned, but these times are very so infrequent, scattered, and small."

This blessed statement comes next, "*a merciful God has promised that He will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed.*"

This kind of soul reminds me of the edge of lilac bushes that outlined our farm as a boy. In the spring they were so fresh, leafy, blooming with flowers. I can still remember the smell and how bright and refreshing the lilac blossoms were to the eye.

But as spring faded into summer, the dry season would set in. The dust of the settled in thick layers upon the leaves. What a change took place. Lilac petals dried on the ground, leaves became parched and shrank. There was a very real change, but to the eye, not a change for the better. Or so I thought. I looked the other day at some pictures of that farmyard. One from my childhood, and one from my youth. A change for the good had taken place. Over the seasons and years, rain and storms, heat and sun produced an amazing effect. I looked and the hedge was all the stronger for having experienced the midday heat and the midnight dew, the summer blast and the autumn frost. So with the weak believer.

When he has gone through some storms, been dusted over by the world, been burnt and blackened by the sun, he is ripened and matured. What he has lost in beauty he has gained in strength. And even though the wintry blast may howl through his branches, it does not snap them off. Now there is a strength in him, and a ripening, which the young hedge never had.

So the Lord will deal with any who find themselves longing for the things of God, especially as they pertain to election. He has “promised that he will not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed.”

If this describes you, then it is time to stir up your heart to action. The Lord has tied a knowledge of election with nearness to Him. If we are not faithful in these things, is it any wonder that we never attain a knowledge of it? As we venture out by faith, the blast of heat, and the cold of winter, and the dust of this world will try us. But it's in the diligent use of these things, and the desiring of them, that ring the heart to a sense of peace.

Election can only be known by its fruits. We cannot climb up into the secret of God's eternal counsels. We cannot read the book of life. The fruits of the Spirit, seen and manifested in a man's conversation, are the only grounds on which we can ascertain that he is one of God's Elect. Where the marks of God's Elect can be seen, there, and there only, have we any warrant for saying "this is one of the Elect." How do I know that yon distant ship on the horizon of the sea has any pilot or steersman on board? I cannot with the best telescope discern anything but her masts and sails. Yet I see her steadily moving in one direction. That is enough for me. I know by this that there is a guiding hand on board, though I cannot see it. Just so it is with God's Election. The eternal decree we cannot possibly see. But the result of that decree cannot be hid. **J.C. Ryle**