

Celebrating Sovereign Salvation Eph 1:3-14

“No man will ever be lost who wants to be saved. In other words, we could never say a man is lost because he was not chosen. The Bible never says that. The reason men are lost is because they’re sinners. And men do not want to come to God.” – S Lewis Johnson

“The Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God and the free moral choices of man with equal emphasis. Richard Fulle, the third president of the Southern Baptist Conviction, said, ‘It is impossible for us to reject either of these great truths, and it is equally impossible for our minds to reconcile them.’” – Jerry Bridges

“God chooses us, not because we believe, but that we may believe...” – Augustine (354-430)

“Until we are willing to grant that there is no way that God could be unjust to fallen sinful creatures we will have serious difficulties with the doctrine of election.” George Zemek

"To make human action the cause of divine blessing is to overturn the whole nature of salvation." - Iain Murray

“If any man doth ascribe of salvation, even the very least, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learnt Jesus Christ aright.” – Martin Luther

Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God’s will. God did not choose us because we are worthy, but by choosing us He makes us worthy. – Thomas Watson

The doctrine of grace humble a man without degrading him and exalt a man without inflating him. – Charles Hodge

There can be no grace when there is no sovereignty. Deny God’s right to choose whom He will and you deny His right to save whom He will. Deny His right to save whom He will and you deny that salvation is of grace. If salvation is made to hinge upon any merit or fitness in man, seen or foreseen, grace is at an end. – Horatius Bonar

God elects us in order to eliminate all boasting, all self-reliance, all human pride. G.K. Beale

The doctrine of predestination promotes humility, not arrogance; assurance, not apprehension; responsibility, not apathy; holiness, not complacency; and mission, not privilege. – John Stott

I am persuaded that the doctrine of predestination is one of the “softest pillows” upon which the Christian can lay his head, and one of the “strongest staffs” upon which he may lean, in his pilgrimage along this rough road. – Charles Haddon Spurgeon

<https://www.georgemuller.org/quotes/category/election>

This quote below is from George Muller who struggled with the doctrine of election until he studied it biblically.

“Before this period I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and final persevering grace; so much so that, a few days after my arrival at Teignmouth I called election a devilish doctrine. I did not believe that I had brought myself to the Lord, for that was too manifestly false; but yet I held, that I might have resisted finally.

And further, I knew nothing about the choice of God's people, and did not believe that the child of God, when once made so, was safe for ever. In my fleshly mind I had repeatedly said, "If once I could prove that I am a child of God for ever, I might go back into the world for a year or two, and then return to the Lord, and at last be saved."

But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the word of God. Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely as an instrument; and being made willing to receive what the Scriptures said; I went to the Lord, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths. To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines.

As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state, for God's glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might and as I ought to be, yet, by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period.

My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before. And for this have I been strengthened by the Lord, in a great measure, through the instrumentality of these truths. For in the time of temptation, I have been repeatedly led to say:

"Should I thus sin? I should only bring misery into my soul for a time, and dishonour God; for, being a son of God for ever, I should have to be brought back again, though it might be in the way of severe chastisement."

Thus, I say, the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to realize it) has often been the means of *producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin*. It is only the notional apprehension of such truths, the want of having them in the heart, whilst they are in the head, which is dangerous."

Some Review: (See the Godliness Study Major Review)

“The Motivations of the Godly Man”

1.) The Love of God: 2 Cor 5:14-15; Rom 5:1-11; 1 Jn 4:9-11 2.) The Goodness/Grace of God: 1 Pet 2:1-3; Ps 34:8; Titus 3:4; 1 Cor 15:10; 3.) The Wisdom of God: Rom 11:33-36; 16:25-27; 1 Cor 1:25; Isa 55:6-9; Ps 147:4-5; The Power of God: Jer 32:17; 1 Cor 1:24; 2 Cor 4:7; Rom 8:31-39; Isa 40:25-26; Eph 3:20!

The Problem with the Doctrine of Election:

Sadly, this doctrine has been one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented doctrines in all of Scripture. Even worse, this doctrine has been used by many to cause division and dissention among genuine believers throughout church history which is very disheartening. I believe this doctrine to be one of the most glorious and comforting truths in Scripture but the way that man often handles this truth robs God of His glory and robs man of the truth driven confidence of rightly knowing God. Therefore, before we embark on this very long and slow study of God and His electing love it is imperative that we start from the right place. Here are two key and nonnegotiable perspectives we must have we are going to see this doctrine rightly and more importantly apply it personally.

1. We must always start with and always remain in a **humble** mindset!

It is critical that we start this study and every study with a clear, biblical, and humble mindset about the amazing nature of God and the sovereign salvation He Himself brings to all who believe! WHY? **Because God can be truly known but never fully known!** See Rom 11:28-36 and explain the primary topic in the broader context (Rom 9-11) and what this final doxology (11:33-36) declares both about the topic and our God. For help consider these passages Dt 29:29; Job 11:7-9; 36:26; 37:5; Ps 92:5; 104:24 (consider the whole Psalm); 139:17; 145:3-4; 147:5-6; Isa 40:28; 44:7; 55:8-9; Micah 7:18. So what should be our response as we consider the nature of our God? How helpful would it be to have the perspective of Job as we grapple with this most difficult and glorious doctrine of election (Job 42:1-6)? Read Ps 50:21 and see if you can identify one of the biggest problems with man in the study of God? See how Paul seeks to preempt this kind of humble perspective in these verses (Rom 9:6; 9:14-18; 9:19-21; 9:30; 11:1-6; 11:25-32; 11:33-36).

Wayne Grudem said it well when speaking on the incomprehensibility of almighty God when he declared, “It is not only true that we can never fully understand God; it is also true that we can never fully understand any single thing about God. His greatness (Ps 145:3), his understanding (Ps 147:5), his knowledge (139:6), his riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways (Rom 11:33) are all beyond our ability to understand fully.”

2. We must always start with and always remain in an **honest** mindset!

It is an undeniable fact that this doctrine and all the glorious doctrines surrounding God's sovereignty are not easy for finite and fallen redeemed man to understand. Therefore, a right way to study these doctrines, which are meant to be studied and enjoyed for God revealed them to us, is with a humble and honest heart! Honest first about the difficulty of the doctrine. When we come to the doctrine of election where are immediately confronted with the two seemingly contradictory truths of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. I like to refer to these as theological tensions which are divinely placed in Scripture by God to drive us trust Him (Rom 1:17). There are many of these to found in God's Word. One of my professors writing on this topic says, "In theology, the words, "paradox," "antinomy," and "tension" are used as synonyms for each other... Statements or doctrines about God and His works that, from human perspective, are apparently mutually contradictory and yet have internal and external consistency and are, therefore, true."

There are many of these throughout Scripture that bring tension into our lives and I believe they are put there by God to drive us to trust Him and ultimately rest in His perfect revelation even if I cannot fully understand how the points of tension work together in perfect harmony. Here are some examples of some seeming theological paradoxes we must face when studying Scripture.

1. The Trinity: God is one essence, but three Persons, with each Person being the entire essence (Mt 3:16-17; 28:19).
2. The Person of Christ: Jesus is a complete divine nature and a complete human nature in one Person (Col 2:9; Phil 2:5-11).
3. Scripture: The Bible is fully inspired by God, and therefore inerrant, and yet also written by fully, consciously engaged fallible human authors (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21).
4. Salvation is completely by sovereign grace because man is utterly unable to believe and yet man is fully responsible to believe (John 6:35-70).
5. Progressive Sanctification: Scripture contends that God sanctifies the Christian completely. And yet, the Christian is responsible to grow in holiness (Phil 2:12-13).
6. The paradox of prayer - Why pray if God has already sovereignly determined the outcome of all things (cf. Luke 18:1 with Isaiah 46:10)?
7. The paradox of Christ's death - Did God kill Christ (Acts 2:23), or the Jews (Acts 2:23), or the Romans (Acts 2:23), or humanity in general by virtue of their sin and need of a savior (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:2)?
8. The paradox of salvation - Am I saved (Rom. 10:13), or being saved (1 Cor. 1:18) or just nearer to the time of my salvation (Rom. 13:11)?
9. The paradox of God's Love: Does God love the World (Jn 3:16 cf. Mt 5:44-45) in the same way He loves His special elect people (Jn 15:13 cf. Rom 5:8)?
10. The paradox of the atonement: Is the cross of Christ only for the elect or does the cross work of Christ bring impact on both the elect and nonelect? Is it limited or unlimited in its work or is it both understood rightly (1 Jn 2:2; Eph 5:25; 1 Tim 4:10)?

God is completely sovereign over the lives of humans. He directs all things according to His will, and has unconditionally ordained some to be saved. (Ps 115:3; 135:6; 139:16; Prov 21:1; Dan

4:35; Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28-30; 9:21; 1 Pet 1:2). Yet people are held accountable for their own decisions and actions (e.g., Matt 16:27; John 3:36; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17; Rev 22:12).

John MacArthur comments on these two truths when he says, “May I tell you? They will always run parallel. They will always run parallel. They will never come together. They will never intersect. They will never be diminished; legitimately, they are what they are. The fact that you don’t understand how they go together only proves that you’re less than you should be. It doesn’t say anything about God. Your inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, my fallenness. People ask me all the time, “How do you harmonize those?” And my answer is, “I don’t. I can’t.” They can’t be harmonized in the human mind. But realize this, you are a puny mind and so am I, and collectively we are puny compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God. All I can tell you is that in the Word of God, these truths run parallel. And the answer is to believe them both with all your heart. And the one, divine sovereignty, will inform your worship and the other, human responsibility, will motivate your evangelism.”

Note this tension in the following: Gen 50:20; Isa 10:1-12; Matt 11:27-30; Jn 1:12-13; Jn 6:35-40; Lk 22:22; Acts 2:23; Acts 4:23-28; Acts 13:48; Phil 3:12-13

Sadly, this doctrine has been one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented doctrines in all of Scripture. Here are some other reasons for this problem to consider as you guard and prepare your heart to listen and learn from God’s perfect Word. (1) Incorrectly taught or never explained! (2) Misconceptions on the person and work of God! (3) Wrong perspectives on the nature of man! (4) Inaccurate views on salvation! (5) Incomplete and Unbiblical perspectives on the nature of love! (6) A fallen understanding of “fairness”; “freedom” and “Equality” (7) A Theology from below instead of from above! (8) An unwillingness to trust God and His Word! (9) A lack of disciplined study of the Bible and doctrine! (10) A natural refusal of anything that attacks personal autonomy. Can you relate to any of these or identify which ideology or perspective you might be susceptible to? Can you think of any others that might serve as roadblocks or hindrances to our study on this topic?