

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Do you rejoice in the doctrine of God's sovereign election?

Do you consider it a precious blessing from Him? You should because Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did! The effect on his ministry.

1. Paul attributed his own conversion, and the conversion of all of his converts, to God's sovereign election!

Paul never once mentioned the so-called free will of man when talking about anyone's conversion. He never considered the will of man the decisive factor in anyone's salvation. This is not to say that man does not have to be willing to believe, but it does mean that Paul viewed that willingness as a gift from God and not a product of man's so-called free will. Notice the great joy Paul expresses as he gives the right person the deserved credit for salvation. He always praises God's sovereign electing grace for anyone's conversion.

A. His own conversion. Paul's conversion experience is recorded several places in Acts and his epistles. In every case God is credited from beginning to end as the reason Paul is saved. Notice one instance of his testimony:

Galatians 1:15-16 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

I am sure you notice how strikingly different that is from the "I decided to give Jesus a chance," or the "I'm glad I was willing to let God save me," kind of testimonies we hear today. Notice the following things: (1) Paul's conversion did not take place "When

I decided to accept," but "when it pleased God." (2) It was not when Paul decided to "open my heart and let Jesus come in," but when (a) God "called me [effectually, or regenerated me] by his grace," and (b) "revealed his Son in me." A new heart is not the result of a dead sinner's willingness to be made alive but is the direct result of a divine revelation of the Holy Spirit's power to give a dead sinner a new heart. (3) Paul did not need a personal worker or counselor to convince him that he had been converted. He did not have to "confer with flesh and blood" and be assured that "Jesus has indeed come into your heart." When the Lord of Glory takes up his abode in a poor sinner's heart, that sinner knows something amazing has happened.

It is interesting how insistent Paul is that his readers understand that it was not his will, but God's sovereign will and purpose, that was totally responsible for his conversion.

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God...(Gal. 4:9).

Notice that the "or rather are known of God" is a very conscious and deliberate little insertion. It is almost as if Paul was saying, "I do not want you to misunderstand. I surely believe knowing God is vital, but I only know [love] God because he first knew [loved] me." Today we might paraphrase Paul's words this way, "Just in case a 'free will' enthusiast thinks I agree with him, let me set the record straight. I believe in sovereign electing grace. I was known by God long before I knew God."

B. All of his converts. Paul is not at all vague about why some people responded to the gospel under his preaching and others did not. He always made it clear that when anyone was converted God alone was to have the praise. Since Paul believed that God's sovereign electing grace was responsible for every man's conversion, he consciously gave God the praise for every conversion. The following text is typical:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13, 14).

The NIV translates it "chose you to be saved." Paul never congratulates the sinner on

his wise choice or his good sense in "accepting Christ" nor did he praise himself or some other preacher for the 'great message.' He credited God with the whole of every man's salvation from beginning to end, including the gift of faith.

C. Paul not only attributed his own conversion, and the conversion of all of his converts to the electing grace of God, he did the same for all conversions. Acts 13:48 is a statement concerning conversion in general. Again, we have noted earlier how radically different this report is from the "I had ten first time decisions last week" brag sheets published today. My purpose in quoting it again is to emphasize that this is a deliberate statement by Paul giving conscious praise to God's electing grace as the sole cause of all of the conversions that afternoon. Free will does not enter the picture.

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 (Acts 13:48).

2. Predestination was the foundation of Paul's life and call to the ministry!

How strange to read what Paul says about the effect that the truth of God's sovereign electing grace had upon him and his ministry and then hear sincere Christians say, "We should not preach about election and predestination since it is a dangerous doctrine." These people are especially afraid of hurting new believers with heavy doctrine and even more concerned that lost people not be discouraged by hearing about the sovereignty of God. Let me answer these two objections with Paul's own testimony. Examine the following verses carefully and you will see how silly these objections are.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up

upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth (Acts 22:10-14).

Let's make sure we get the message Paul was conveying. (1) Paul freely admits that he was not seeking after God. He was filled with blind rage against Christ and Christians and fighting Christ as hard as he could. (2) He was testifying that he was blinded; spiritually by his religious ignorance, and physically by the miraculous intervention of God. (3) Jesus spoke to him from heaven. No man was ever more amazed than Paul when he learned that this 'Lord' who had struck him was none other than the very Jesus he was persecuting. (4) Ananias said, "Receive your sight," and Paul was able to see. There is no hint of a suggestion that Paul had to be willing to comply before he would see. This incident is a manifestation of sovereign grace and power from beginning to end. Paul says, "And the same hour I looked..." The looking by Paul did not give his sight. The looking was the result of God giving him sight by the command of Ananias.

This passage clearly answers the two objections we are discussing. First of all, it proves that the first Christian doctrine that Paul learned as a brand new convert was the doctrine of election. Notice again what Ananias said: "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee..." The very first truth that Paul, a brand new convert learned, was that he was saved because God had chosen him in electing grace. And, I might add, that was a truth that Paul never forget nor did he ever cease to be amazed that it was true.

Notice the following things in verse 14. (1) Paul states that he was chosen in order to know God's will. He did not first know that will and then decide to believe. (2) He was chosen so that he would be able to 'see' that Just One. He did not first see, like what he saw, and then decide to believe. (3) He was chosen to 'hear' and did not choose because he first heard and then decide to accept it. Isn't it amazing how carefully the Holy Spirit chooses his words?

I think the Holy Spirit is explaining that it is essential to start off one's Christian life with the clear realization that one is a child of sovereign grace. You are not your own but you have been bought with a price and he who purchased you has every right to do with you as he pleases. We did not enter into a partnership with God at conversion, we were slaves and have been purchased out of slavery. We have neither the ability nor the right to boast about either the power of our wills or our rights to make our own choices. There can be only one boss and the sooner we learn that God himself is that boss, the better off we will be. Paul's experience shows that God's purpose is that we learn that truth at conversion.

It may be a primary reason for pastors and others frustration and an attitude of giving up on some people . One cannot tell sinners that they did God a favor by allowing him to save them and then get them to live like they owe everything to God's grace. One cannot lead a sinner to believe that he alone, with his 'free will,' was the one decisive factor in his conversion and then urge him to feel a deep and life-changing obligation to God's sovereign grace.

If someone wants to push sinners into making a decision that is totally designed to help them to be happy and then try to get those people to willingly make sacrifices that just might infringe on their happiness. One cannot get goats to act like sheep but one can surely get stressed out trying. If one teaches the sinner he is "the master of his fate" don't be surprised if he lives like that were true. Teach him he is a bondsman of sovereign electing grace and it is a different matter all together.

The second thing that Paul's conversion teaches us concerns election and gospel preaching. Not only was election the first Christian doctrine Paul learned, but when he was telling about his conversion, in the Acts 22:10-14 passage, he was giving his testimony to a group of lost people. Paul was not afraid to talk about election in evangelism. Thing is, when and how to do it.

Sovereign election like any other doctrine, rightly preached, van be a means of

preaching salvation.

3. Predestination was the foundation of Paul's missionary zeal to preach the gospel.

How often have we heard the cry, "If I believed election I would never witness." Actually, if I did not believe election, I would not witness! If I believed that the sinner alone had the power to make God's plan of salvation work, I would realize that no one would ever be saved. "But," we are told, "preaching election will destroy all missionary effort." Again Paul's life proves this objection to be groundless. Notice first how election motivated Paul:

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city (Acts 18:9, 10).

We don't usually think of Paul as a man who was afraid, but here is one instance where the Holy Spirit tells us that Paul was afraid. We can imagine that the Devil was whispering in his ear about how hopeless the situation was as well how useless were Paul's efforts. "You really don't believe you can persuade anyone in that wicked city to become Christians. You may well lose your life." And how did God encourage Paul? He used the truth of election! God said, "Paul you are safe wherever I call you to go. I have some elect in that city and they are going to respond to the gospel when I open their hearts by my power." That is the thing that motivated our Lord in John 14:14-16. Some people, very particular people, simply must be saved because it is the determined purpose of God. Paul was willing to suffer anything and everything for that purpose to be accomplished.

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim. 2:10).

Why would Paul suffer for something that did not exist? Why would he endure all that he did unless he was sure of the outcome. John Patton was a missionary to the New Hebrides islands. He lost his wife and child to disease. He was nearly killed on many

occasions. He labored for nearly twenty-five years with no 'success.' Do you think he ever felt discouraged? Do you think the Devil ever whispered in his ear as he did Paul's? What would keep someone preaching in such a situation? John Patton stood over the grave of his wife and children and prayed, "Father, you have chosen a people out of every tribe and tongue to be saved. Some of those chosen ones are on this island and I will not leave until they are safely in the fold." That is what biblical election will do for missions. In God's time Patton saw the island swept into the kingdom of God.

I freely admit that the truth of God's electing grace, and the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit to enable a person to be able to believe, will kill a lot of fleshly zeal that has hatched up some very 'successful' carnal methods of 'getting decisions' (and the sooner such things are killed the better), but I assure you that the Bible and history testify that election is the only thing that can produce and maintain true gospel mission work. Many sincere people have gone to the mission field with genuine pity and human love for those "poor people who are just waiting to hear the gospel" and after two break-ins of their homes, the loss of their possessions and constant threats to their life, have changed their minds and feelings about "those poor people."

There is one more passage that proves that believing election did not adversely affect Paul's ministry.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved (Rom. 10:1).

Now remember, the above words immediately follow those awesome words in Romans 9. There is no chapter in all of the Word of God that exalts sovereign election like the ninth chapter of Romans. "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Romans 9:18), does not sound very 'free-willish' to me. That is high, high, Calvinism. And yet the man who wrote those awesome words immediately says that he longs to see those same people described in chapter nine converted. He sincerely prays for them and continues to witness to them. Human logic

may say it is a waste of time, but that did not stop the great apostle from preaching the gospel to all men and pleading with God to open their hearts to believe.

4. Predestination was the ground upon which Paul appealed to believers when he urged them to worship and praise God.

We have already covered one of the most obvious texts that teach this truth. Look again at our first article and review the comments on 2 Thessalonians 2:13. Notice especially that election is the source of joy and thanksgiving.

It is also as part of God predestined work in the created order.

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Brethren, I do not care if we are talking about your ethnicity, or the color of your skin, or your salvation. In every case it was decided by God's sovereign predestination and had nothing to do with your so-called free will. The same thing is true of your physical health and mental ability. Whether you are a genius or a slow learner, you did not choose your IQ with your so-called free will. You must say, "It was God who made me to differ from another." Your personal salvation must be treated the same way. If you are one of Christ's sheep and rejoice in his free forgiveness, it is only because he choose you to be a sheep. Your free will did not enable a goat to change itself into a sheep. It was sovereign electing that "made you to differ from another."

I trust you can see the point that Paul is making. He is using election to destroy both our arrogant self-sufficiency and our constant tendency to stupid prejudice. No one who understands and feels the truth of 1 Corinthians 4:7 can ever again look down their nose at anybody. They cannot boast, because, as Paul says, "Whatever you have you received from God alone."

5. Paul based his appeals to believers to be holy on the fact of their election.

It is no accident that Paul's epistles always begin with doctrine. He does not appeal

for a right response until he first gives a clear and convincing reason for demanding that response. In other words, doctrine precedes duty as the essential foundation for the duty. Duty is urged as the only logical response to the doctrine set forth. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 is the typical Pauline method of appealing to believers to be holy.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Why do I owe God perfect obedience in all that I do? Because I am not my own but belong entirely to him. I belong to him simply because he bought me with the blood of his Son.

Does the object purchased choose who is going to purchase it, or does the one who pays the price choose what he wants to buy? The purchaser is the one acting and the object being purchased is passive. Did you choose God to purchase you, or did he purchase you because he first choose you to be purchased? How can a believer not want to glorify God? It would be insane for a true child of God not to sincerely want to please the one who purchased him out of sin, shame, guilt, and death! And, I might add, God has given all of his sheep, without a single exception, a "sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7)

A careful study of all of Paul's epistles will find this principle to be the norm. First doctrine and then appeal to personal behavior. To say, as many sincere sentimentalists today say, "Never mind doctrine, let's just have practical living," is to miss Paul's message. The message of Paul is this: "It is impossible to have godly practical living without first laying a foundation of sovereign grace where the only possible response can be holy living.