

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 47

KEY TERMS: ELECTION, PART 8

One Reformed theologian actually presented a unique summation of the doctrine of election that I want to share with you. I'm not totally on board with what this man writes and the way he presented it, but he makes some important points. I'm not in total agreement with his understanding of Christ and election in relation to Him. Ultimately, however, he is saying that election is an appointment to service and that is quite an unusual admission for a Reformed Calvinist. His book was written as a criticism of the doctrine of election as Calvinists interpret it because it created in them a desire to remain true to their theology rather than to proclaiming the gospel and it prevented them from preaching the gospel to all people.

“Election in biblical thought is never a selection, a taking of this and a rejection of that out of multiple realities. To be sure, God began Israel with Abram from Ur of the Chaldees; and Jesus was born out of Israel according to the flesh; and the church emerged out of Jew and Gentile. But God brought *life out of death*. None of these was what it became through election. Election is always a creative act. In biblical thought, Israel, Christ and the church are not existing realities that God selectively chooses out of a number of extant Israels, Christs, or churches. Israel, Christ, and the church exist only because each is elected by God. They are created by the dynamics of election, for they are what they are only by virtue of their election. The church would not be the church apart from its election. It might be a social club or a community of shared religious views, but it would not be the church. Because election is always in this sense exclusive and unique, there is only one Israel, one Christ, and one church. If there were more than one of each, God's election would in each case be arbitrary, and God's election is never arbitrary. What God elects he creates, and he does so for a purpose. Consequently, the election of each is a call to service, a summons to be a co-laborer with God in the actualization of God's elective purpose and goal. For this reason all forms of God's election are profoundly historical and eschatological. The election of Israel was not an end in itself. The election of Christ was not an end in itself—hence his servant form and service. And the election of the church is not an end in itself, for it must preach the gospel to all nations and every creature, making known to the principalities and powers of the heavenly places God's eternal purpose in Christ, and provoking unbelieving Israel to such jealousy as will arouse its passion to repossess its inheritance, its election, its Christ. If Israel were a selection out of many nations, it would have a right to pride. Its election would be the ground of its pride. If Jesus had been a selection out of many existing Christs, his very selection would provide a basis for pride.

If the church were selected out of many extant religious bodies, its selection itself would constitute a ground for pride. But no form of biblical election is a ground for pride, for each object of election owes its very existence to its election. And no nation, individual, or church has ground for pride if its very existence stems from its election" [James Daane, *The Freedom of God: A Study of Election and Pulpit*, pp. 150-151].

The Scriptures are perfectly clear that Christ died for all people, He died to pay the sin debt for the sins of the world, and His desire is for all people to be saved.

Of primary importance to understand is that the lake of fire was not prepared for people; it was strictly prepared for the devil and his angels. It is rare to see a discussion of this issue in connection with election but that it has been is evident in Arthur Pink's work because he argues against using Matthew 25:41 to make the case that God does not predestine people to hell [A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 109]. In other words, Pink does believe God predestined people to the lake of fire.

Matthew 25:34 ³⁴"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matthew 25:41 ⁴¹"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

In Matthew 25:34, the Lord informed us that the Kingdom has been prepared "from the foundation of the world," but that claim is not made for the lake of fire which was apparently not "prepared" until Satan rebelled and it became necessary. This is an important point concerning election. If it is true that unbelievers will be consigned to the lake of fire, and it is true, and for the sake of argument assuming it is true that God elected in eternity past those who would be saved, then the lake of fire would have been necessary from the foundation of the world because those who would be unsaved were not only known before creation but were decreed to be lost and damned before creation. However, the Lord seems to be implying the lake of fire was an unnecessary element of creation and therefore was created only later when it became necessary. But because this Calvinist understanding of election is untrue, the identity of those unbelievers who would be consigned there was not decreed before creation. God obviously knew who they would be but He didn't decree who they would be. Even though these are deductive conclusions based on Matthew 25:34 and 41 and not explicitly inductive, exegetical conclusions, they do have some validity based on the words of the Lord. The context of these verses in the Olivet Discourse is, of course, the judgment of the sheep and goats at the end of the Tribulation but the words spoken concerning the creation of the kingdom and the lake of fire are timeless

truths contained therein. There is a reason why He said these things in the way He said them. The lake of fire was not prepared specifically for mankind because man would be afforded the opportunity to avoid it by grace through faith. If all this is true, then election, as defined by Calvinism, cannot be true. That's why Pink tried to counter the argument I'm making; he knows it is a devastating argument against election as Calvinists define it.

I could find only a few commentaries that even mentioned the fact the lake of fire was not prepared for anyone other than the devil and his angels. Only the commentaries authored by dispensationalists I checked understood the "brethren" of the Lord to be the Jewish people although a few opponents of dispensational theology mentioned it and dismissed it because they are replacement theologians. The majority view is the "brethren" are Christian believers, Jew or Gentile. Those who preach a social gospel claim the "brethren" are the world's poor and downtrodden. One commentator, who completely misunderstands the Olivet Discourse in total because he is a replacement theologian, does have a proper understanding of the lake of fire in the context of this pericope. "The scenario repeats itself with the goats. These are people doomed to eternal punishment. As the kingdom was prepared, so also the fire. But it is interesting that the fire was not prepared for the goats but for the rebellious angels. Neither is it prepared 'from the creation of the world' (v. 34). These differences support a sublapsarian theology, in which God originally made no provision for lost people or hell in his creative purposes, but once humans and angels freely chose to rebel, then a place of punishment was prepared. No Scripture ever indicates that the fallen angels had any subsequent chance to repent. But people do. So no one need join the demons in this fire. Still, some will opt for hell by rejecting Christ. When they do, they have no one but themselves to blame" [Craig L. Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: Matthew*, pp. 378-379].

There are a number of Scriptures that proclaim the truth that Christ Jesus did, in fact, die for the sins of the world, that is, for all human beings, and that God desires all people to be saved. Obviously, many people reject His grace gift offer of eternal life but that does not negate the offer itself. We are going to examine a few of these Scriptures looking at both sides of the issue so we may be thoroughly equipped to biblically argue our case against the doctrine of election as it is commonly defined by theologians.

Christ paid the sin debt for the world and through Him all people have the opportunity to receive the free grace gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This is an issue that could be examined in more depth than we will do here, but I want to simply prove the fact that Scripture defeats any notion that Christ died only for what Calvinists call the elect meaning those who God determined to save in eternity past. These Scriptures are all seriously abused and misused in order to justify the doctrine of election.

John 1:29 ²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world [κόσμος]!"

By simply reading this Scripture, would any person, believer or not and uneducated in the Bible and theology, read this verse in the context of John 1 and understand it to be saying anything other than somehow Jesus was of God and was going to remedy the sin problem of the whole world meaning planet earth and the people inhabiting it? I can't imagine anyone reading this could or would read any other meaning into it. Yet, Calvinists must redefine "world" in order to maintain their doctrine of election. According to their doctrine of election, God can't possibly mean to say "takes away the sin of the world" because Jesus only died for the sin of the elect; God doesn't take away the sin of the world according to Calvinist theology.

Here is their reasoning and please note it is based on their theological system and logical, deductive human reasoning rather than on an exegetical understanding of the Scriptures even though they use numerous verses as proof texts to justify their theology. In order to do that, they have to put a Calvinist spin on the Scriptures that is foreign to the text. That's why I maintain their interpretive understanding of the Bible is based on theological hermeneutics rather than on literal hermeneutics. "There are two classes of texts that speak of Christ's saving work in *general terms*: (a) those containing the word 'world' ...[including John 1:29], and (b) those containing the word 'all'...One reason for the use of these expressions was to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jews alone. Such phrases as 'the world,' 'all men,' and 'every creature' were used by the New Testament writers to emphatically correct this mistake. These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without *distinction* (i.e., He died for Jews and Gentiles alike), but they are not intended to indicate that Christ died for all men without *exception* (i.e., He did not die for the purpose of saving each and every lost sinner)" [David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, p. 50]. There is a serious hidden implication in the statement by these men that God did not die for the purpose of "saving each and every lost sinner." No one outside of universalism ever says that Christ died to specifically save every lost sinner as an individual person; we do say He died to make their salvation possible; the argument they claim we are making is not the argument we are making at all. People become saved only when they by faith believe in what He did for them as an individual on the cross. This is a red herring argument and it is designed to fool people into accepting their theology and to divert attention away from the Scriptures that do, in fact, tell us Christ died for the sin of the world. That's why they redefine "world" in order to deny the obvious meaning of the word. In terms of grammar, they make the claim that because the words "world" and "all" are sometimes used as figurative speech and even hyperbole they are always used this way at least as they apply to Soteriology. That's false. Context matters and literal

hermeneutics take into account figurative speech. One verse they use as a proof text, for example, is when Paul, while defending himself before the Jews in Jerusalem, said Ananias told him he would be a witness to “all men” (Acts 22:15) and that obviously can’t mean every human being alive at the time. I can recognize at least four problems with this line of thought. Ananias didn’t use the words “all men;” [see Acts 9:15] Paul was apparently summarizing and/or generalizing what Ananias said to him. Second, Paul is simply using it as a figure of speech to indicate he was to preach the gospel to all the people with whom he came in contact and through them the gospel would spread even further. Third, just because a word is used in a figurative sense at times does not call for it to be interpreted that way every time it is used and that is what is done in this system when it pertains to Soteriology. Finally, in a way, Paul has, in fact, spoken to “all men” through the inspired Scriptures that contain the letters he wrote to the churches and to which we have access today.

In Calvinism, the words are redefined to mean “...’all’ of God’s elect without distinction of nationality, social prestige, moral character, age or sex...” [A. W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 69]. In respect to the word “all,” another theologian writes, “the reference may be to what we call ‘ethnic’ universalism, namely, that Jesus died for people of all nations, tongues, races, and tribes” [John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*, p. 907]. In other words, not everyone can respond to the gospel message and be saved because not everyone is elect but the elect from all segments of society and from all the nations of the world can and will respond and be saved. This is their most common argument. When it pertains to Soteriology, the words “world” and “all” and “whoever” can only carry the redefinitions imposed by this theological system because Jesus did not die for the sin of every human being past, present, and future. He died only for the elect.

Searching the lexicons for the Calvinist redefinition of κόσμος will be a search conducted in vain; this definition is a theological imposition onto the word. The word simply does not carry the meaning Calvinists assign to it in order to justify the doctrine of election as they understand it. “This view [referring to the definition of κόσμος] yields a full unity of concept. The universe and all individual creatures, the visible world and the invisible, nature and history, humanity and the spirit world, are all brought under the single term κόσμος. The κόσμος is the sum of the divine creation which has been shattered by the fall, which stands under the judgment of God, and in which Jesus Christ appears as the Redeemer” [Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “κόσμος”]. Κόσμος is primarily thought of as the universe as an ordered structure, the earth as the surface of the planet where mankind dwells, and as a world system [governed] by godless world standards. “κόσμος always has the spatial meaning ‘world’ with its various nuances....It can denote the universe...[it] often refers to the world as the sphere or place of human life, the earth...the term can stand by

metonymy for those who inhabit the world, thus, humanity; esp. in Paul and John, it designates the place and object of God's saving activity....human beings are so much a part of the world that κόσμος in John almost always refers to humanity....The κόσμος constitutes a uniform subject that opposes God in enmity, resists the redeeming work of the Son, does not believe in Him, and indeed hates him. It is ruled by 'the prince of this world', i.e., 'the evil one'" [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "κόσμος"]. There is nothing in the meaning of this word to suggest that its use only refers to a subset of elect, saved humanity rather than to all the people of the world or κόσμος; that is a theological conclusion and not a linguistic conclusion based on a word study within the context of the Scriptures. It is a word study informed by theology first and biblical context second but even then only when it conforms to the priority of the theology.

The bottom line in all this concerns the use of literal hermeneutics and the exercise of biblical discernment skills. Anytime theologians redefine words in order to justify their interpretations of Scripture, warning bells should sound a biblical alarm in your head concerning your understanding of those Scriptures. Don't believe something just because some well-educated, famous pastor or theologian says it. Don't believe things simply because they represent the historical theology of the church. The early church fathers departed from biblical truth quite early in church history particularly as it pertains to Soteriology. Dr. Lightner, who is a Calvinist to some extent, explains this abuse of Scripture by hyper-Calvinists. "Rather than allowing each individual context to determine the meaning of universal terms such as 'all,' 'world,' 'whosoever,' 'every man,' etc., strict Calvinists approach the Bible with a theological conviction which restricts every single occurrence of universal terms in a salvation context. No explanation is given why the same words are understood in a restricted sense in salvation passages and not in others. Why does not 'world' mean 'world of the elect' when it is used in relation to Satan's ministry (John 12:31; 14:30)? Or in Christ's high priestly prayer (John 17), a prayer which some insist teaches limited atonement, how is it that 'world' no longer means 'world of the elect'? Seemingly, the only explanation to be given for these arbitrary and inconsistent meanings is to be found in the strict Calvinistic insistence that Christ did not die for all men. Being convinced of that, the limited redemptionist proceeds to defend his position by narrowing the meaning of words wherever the normal and literal meaning would contradict his premise" [Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*, p. 109]. Dr. Lightner has precisely identified the problem with theological hermeneutics; using them allows the interpreter/exegete to do whatever is necessary to the Scriptures in order to maintain the theology. The problem is this often comes at the expense of what God is actually revealing to us in His Word. It is dishonest.

What does John 1:29 mean? John the Baptist was proclaiming that the Lamb of God who had now appeared in Israel was actually going to take away the sin of the world. This truth was couched in figurative language the Jews would have understood due to the obvious connections the Baptist was making to the Passover lamb. "Jesus at the cross actually took away the judicial barrier which made it impossible otherwise for sinners to have eternal life. The basis of eternal condemnation is thus not one's sins, but one's rejection of the life of God....sin is no longer a barrier and all are now savable" [Robert N. Wilkin, *The Grace New Testament Commentary: John*, p. 1:365]. "The Lamb of God has already 'taken away' the sin of the world. The fact that Christ, as substitute, has already borne the undiminished righteous judgment of God against sin, is the sole ground upon which divine forgiveness is now exercised" [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Grace: An Exposition of God's Marvelous Gift*, p. 25]. "...Jesus took sin away. He reconciled the world to God. He paid for our sin by dying on the cross for us. So sin is not the issue anymore. Faith in Jesus for everlasting life is the issue" [Robert N. Wilkin, *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 60]. Calvinists, as expressed in their definition of their doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, still makes personal sins the issue. Arminians do not escape theological scrutiny on this issue either; their theology that claims personal sins cause a person to lose their justification salvation is simply the same problem but from the opposite side of the soteriological spectrum. In one system, the person loses salvation over personal sins and in the other system, the person simply proves they have only been professing faith but never truly had it to lose. They both end up in the same place. Both of these systems devastate the doctrines of the assurance of salvation and eternal security.

As Lewis Sperry Chafer has been quoted as saying, "...because of the cross of Christ people no longer have a *sin problem*, they have a *Son problem*" [as quoted by Robert N. Wilkin in *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 60]. Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding of biblical truth is the fact that people will not be consigned to the lake of fire because of the personal sins they have committed during their lifetimes. The personal sin debt has been paid in full by Christ Jesus for all personal sins that have been committed, are being committed, and will ever be committed and that payment was paid on behalf of all mankind or, to put it another way, the whole world. The Bible expresses this truth both ways. Just as in and with Adam mankind rebelled against God, in Christ the personal sin debt has been paid in full for mankind. The problem is that every human being is permanently separated from God and in rebellion against Him by virtue of their sin nature. Personal sins are the symptom of the problem; they are not the problem. The rebellion inherent within and flowing from the sin nature is the problem. Apart from belief in the One who paid that personal sin debt and made reconciliation with God possible, they will go to an eternal destiny in the lake of fire. Faith is a choice with which all people are faced because all know God. For believers, personal sins are a sanctification issue and break fellowship

with God so it is an important issue with serious consequences; it is just not a justification salvation issue. For unbelievers, personal sins are what they do; they can do nothing else because it is their nature to commit them. The only ultimate remedy for the sin nature is faith in Christ Jesus which enables people to be fully and completely reconciled to God and that not because of anything they have done or will do but because of everything Christ Jesus has done on their behalf.

Unbelief is a specifically unique sin. Apart from Christ, which is the starting point for all people, unbelief flows from and is a part of the sin nature. Once one believes, this unique barrier to forgiveness of sins and to eternal life is abolished and one is adopted into the family of God. To be sure, the sin nature remains as long as the person is still alive but the sin of unbelief has been abolished in Christ through faith. The only basis for judgment is unbelief; therefore, all who believe are not judged and are saved. "The basis of condemnation has been changed by the cross. It is not now primarily the sins of man, but more significantly the one sin of unresponsiveness to the gospel. In a sense there is one sin for which Christ did not die, the sin of unbelief (Jn. 3:18)" [C. Gordon Olson, *Beyond Calvinism & Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation*, p. 295].

John 3:18 ¹⁸"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

It isn't just the doctrine of election and limited atonement that causes Calvinists to deny that Christ paid for the sins of the world. It is also their doctrine of perseverance of the saints. It is important to note that all five points of Calvinism are co-dependent and interrelated and any true five point Calvinist will ridicule anyone who claims to be less than a five point Calvinist. They claim that the dispensationalists who claim some Calvinistic kinship but who reject or modify one or more of the five points are simply ignorant about the integrity and interdependence of all five points. In this theological system, the lack of personal sins and the presence of good works are the identifying characteristics of the true Christian and personal sins and good works are thought to either prove or to disprove one's faith. It is no accident that most of the leading proponents of Lordship salvation doctrine are all Calvinists; their system demands it. Belief is trumped by performance; their system is a faith plus works system and in that sense it is not different from Roman Catholicism. In order to maintain their system, among other things, they must deny the plain truth of the Word of God that Christ died for the sins of the world.

¹ John 2:2 ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world [κόσμος].

It is inconceivable that anyone could read this verse and still say that Christ died only for the sins of the elect—but they do. They deny that Christ died for all people and they redefine “world” to support their theology. This verse actually says that, “...John lets us know in no uncertain terms that the death of Christ not only satisfied God's anger against my sins and the sins of other believers, but also for the sins of the entire world” [David R. Anderson, *Maximum Joy: First John—Relationship or Fellowship?*, p. 67]. “Clearly, the sinning believer's Advocate is perfect. God looks at Him with complete satisfaction—He is completely *propitiated* or appeased with regard to any sins we commit. He is thus fully disposed to respond to our Advocate's intercession for us, since no matter what our sin may be, Christ has made satisfaction for it. Indeed as a propitiation for sin, He more than *just barely* ‘satisfies’ God for our personal sins, or even for all the *sins* of all Christians everywhere. The astounding fact is that this propitiation covers the sins of all humanity, not for ours only but also for the whole world. Needless to say, these words firmly contradict the ultra-Calvinist view that Christ died only for the elect. The tortured efforts made to defend that view in the face of this verse are futile. The contrast here is explicitly between the believers John is addressing and the whole world of mankind which John later says ‘lies under the sway of the wicked one’ (1 John 5:19). Johannine thought and terminology leave absolutely no room for any such concept as ‘the world of the elect.’ Christ's death, therefore, covers the totality of human sin from the beginning of creation until the end of history when eternity begins. For the apostle John, Jesus Christ is ‘the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,’ just as John the Baptist announced Him at the beginning (John 1:29)” [Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistles of John: Walking in the Light of God's Love*, p. 71]. Hodges is completely correct in his assessment; “the doctrine of the world of the elect” is an extra-biblical theological construct that is completely unbiblical and false.

The extent that some theologians will go to justify their redefinition of “world” is, in the words of Dr. Geisler, “shocking.” The Puritan pastor John Owen inserted “elect” in his translation of John 3:16 and he removed the truth that “whoever” believes can be saved and instead substituted the theology that only believers can be saved.

John 3:16 ¹⁶“For God so loved the world [κόσμος], that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Owen's translation reads, “God so loved his elect throughout the world, that he gave his Son with this intention, that by him believers might be saved” [John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, quoted by Norman Geisler in *Chosen But Free*, p. 202]. Owen's translation is shaped by his theology. In his system, God only loves the elect who are found throughout the world; Owen denies that John meant that God loves everyone in the world and desires to see the people of the world saved. Oh no, God

didn't mean that all; God only wants to save the elect. Further, "whoever" cannot mean everyone; it can only refer to those who are the elect because only the elect can come to faith. Owen allowed his theology to trump Scripture. At least Owen is honest; the Calvinist system demands this understanding of justification salvation and that understanding can only be preserved by using theological, hermeneutical presuppositions and by interpreting the text in ways that change the meaning to conform to the theology.

This act by theologians like Owen cannot be without divine consequences at the judgment seat of Christ—if that is, in fact, the judgment they face. There are at least eight Scriptures of which I am aware that either explicitly or implicitly forbids adding to or taking away from the Word of God. What Owen accomplished by redefining this verse is to change the very plan of God He established in order to bring people into His family. How audacious and arrogant for any man to presume to take the responsibility of changing the very Word of God upon himself. Owen was one of the most prominent and influential Puritan pastors in the seventeenth century church in England. The Puritan systematic theology text, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, quotes from the works of Owen on no less than seventy-four different subjects. It is fair to say that Owen influenced not only many people during his lifetime, but he continues to do so through the extant writings that exist and through his influence on Calvinistic theology. One consequence of that influence is that he continues to lead people away from grace and into a gospel of faith plus works.