

Election

Things That Matter Most

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As you know, a few months ago we began a series of messages that we call the things that matter most. What of those truths that are most important for Christians to be fully persuaded of? We have looked at such subjects as the inspiration of Scripture, man's total depravity, regeneration, the new birth, repentance, saving faith, sanctification, God's love, God's justice.

Today I would like to draw the series to a close by raising the question: Who or what is the ultimate cause of our salvation? This question brings us face to face with the great biblical doctrine of election.

It would be easy to skip over this subject---and in fact, I suspect that many do, because it is difficult for us to reconcile it with our perception of how sinners are saved. And it raises questions about God's justice in the minds of many.

A reader of "Modern Reformation" magazine wrote a letter to the editor, frustrated that he had not heard about election in the Methodist, Baptist and Christian Church denominations he had attended from youth. He was angry that he had only begun to hear about this doctrine from the radio ministries of RC Sproul and John MacArthur. He was excited when his pastor began a verse by verse study of Romans 8, which includes the verses:

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

"I sat there listening to those sermons for weeks in anticipation to finally hear somebody teach on these very verses... and he skipped them. (March/April 2006 p. 3)

But the apostle Paul told the Ephesians elders, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27)

He did not avoid subjects because they were difficult or unpopular. As God's ambassador his responsibility was to proclaim the truth regardless of how men received it. And as you may know, the subject of election is for many an unwelcome subject.

C H Spurgeon said,

“There seems to be an inveterate prejudice in the human mind against this doctrine. And although most other doctrines will be received by professing Christians, some with caution, others with pleasure, yet this one seems to be most frequently disregarded and discarded. In many of our pulpits it would be reckoned a high sin and treason to preach a sermon upon election because they could not make it what they call a practical discourse.”

He went on to say, “I know men bite their lip and grind their teeth in rage when I have been preaching the sovereignty of God. The doctrinaires of today will allow a god, but he must not be a king. The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shake the truth, I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox’s gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.”

Although it is possible to avoid the subject of election in our preaching, it is impossible to avoid the subject of election in our reading the Scriptures.

Jesus said, “And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but **for the elect’s sake**, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.” (Mark 13:22)

“For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even **the elect**.” (Mark 13:27)

“And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together **his elect**,” Jesus said, “from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.” (Mark 13:27)

“And shall not God avenge his own **elect**, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7)

In Colossians we find Paul saying, “Put on therefore, as **the elect of God**, holy and beloved, [tender] mercies.” (Colossians 3:12)

When he writes to Titus he calls himself, “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the **faith of God’s elect**.” (Titus 1.1)

The Apostle Peter writes to those who are: “**Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**.” (1 Peter 1:2)

John writes “to the **elect lady**,” (2 John 1), and he speaks of her “**elect sisters**” in vs. 13.

Many other passages might be selected wherein either the word “elect” or “chosen” or “foreordained” or “appointed” is mentioned, or the phrase “my sheep” or some similar designation showing that Christ’s people are distinguished from the rest of mankind.

In fact, you may recall me saying that if you are serious about trying to avoid the subject of election and predestination, references to Christ's sheep, His chosen ones, and all such phrases in the New Testament, you will have to avoid (you might want to jot these down), Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, Jude and Revelation. Now you will be happy to know that you would still have Philemon (25 verses) and 3 John (14 verses) where the subject is simply not mentioned.

What does it mean to be elect? It means that you have been chosen. We have our presidential elections every 4 years, as you know. In November 2008, Barack Obama was chosen to be president of the United States. But until his inauguration in January, 2009, he was known as the president-elect.

President-elect, what does that mean? It means he was the chosen president. The people had chosen him to be the president.

Greek Scholar W E Vine defines the word εκλεκτος (ek-lek-tos'), which is translated **elect** in our English version, it literally signifies **picked out, chosen**. The word is comprised of ek, a little preposition εκ (ek) –**from**, and λεγω (leg'-o) **to gather, to pick out**. You kids keep gathering your legos, gather, to pick out.

Thus, the process of election involves choosing one or many out of a larger group. Election simply means to choose one or many out of a larger group.

It is used of Christ. He is called the chosen of God, "A living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious," (1 Peter 2:4).

It is used of angels as those chosen to be of an especially high rank in the administration of God's providence on the earth or as a contrast to fallen angels.

"I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels," (1 Timothy 5:21).

It is used in reference to **God's choice of the Jewish nation as the peculiar people unto himself.**

"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt," (Acts 13:17).

It is used of the **choice of men by God** or **by the Church** for a special purpose.

In Acts 15:22, after the Jerusalem Council, we read: Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send **chosen men** of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas." That is the word, chosen men, chosen out of the group.

In the great majority of instances it is used to refer to **God's eternal election of individuals to everlasting life.**

In John 15:16, Jesus tells his apostles, “You did not choose Me, but **I chose you** and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”

And listen to 1 Corinthians chapter one, verse 26. The apostle Paul says:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But *God has chosen* the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and *God has chosen* the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised *God has chosen*, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. (1 Cor. 1:26-28)

Why did he do it that way?

“That no flesh should glory in His presence.” (1 Cor. 1:29)

James says, “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not **chosen** the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5).

To speak plainly: The Scripture indicates that those who are saved out of this sinful world are saved **because God chooses to save them**. God *elects* them. The language of Scripture is quite clear. There is no deficiency in the evidence for this truth. The problem with the doctrine of election is not that it is insufficiently proven. The problem with the doctrine of election is that it is insufficiently believed.

Spurgeon again, “I think, my friends, that this overwhelming mass of Scripture testimony must stagger those who dare to laugh at this doctrine. What shall we say of those who have so often despised it and denied its divinity, who have railed at its justice and dared to defy God and call him an almighty tyrant when they have heard of his having elected so many to eternal life? Can you, oh rejecter, cast it out of the Bible? Would you be like the women at the feet of Solomon and have the child rent in halves that you might have your half? Is it not here in Scripture, and is it not your duty to bow before it and meekly acknowledge what you do not understand----to receive it as a truth even though you could not understand its meaning?”

This truth is so clear in Scripture that virtually every great confession of the Church of Christ throughout the ages has recognized it.

See if you can guess where these words are from.

“Those of mankind who are predestinated unto life, God before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable (that is unchangeable), 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.”

Where would you guess that is from? Would that be the **Westminster Confession of Faith** of the Presbyterians, the **39 Articles** of the Church of England? Or is it from the **Belgic Confession** of other reformed churches? No, it is from the **Baptist Confession of 1689**.

Regrettably, many churches have departed from a firm belief in the biblical doctrine of election.

Now, **why** do many of us Christians and non Christians strongly resist this doctrine?

1. Well, for several reasons. **First** of all, it is a very humbling thing to realize that you are not a Christian today because you were more open, more just, more intelligent, more sensitive, more spiritual, more heavenly minded than your peers who have not believed. You are a Christian today simply because God graciously opened your heart just as he opened the heart of Lydia.

“The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)

Paul preached at Antioch. Who believed? The wise, the spiritual, the good, the holy? No, the Scripture says, “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed,” (Acts 13:48).

Can God make it any more clear?

“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

“Lord, you mean, my salvation was not because of anything you saw in me, any spark of goodness, any indication that I might serve you well, nothing of that sort? You just graciously bestowed your mercy and kindness upon me? You opened my heart? You gave me faith to believe?” ---that’s humbling!

2. Secondly, it seems to *make God appear unfair, unjust* to save some and leave others to perish. We will talk more about that.
3. And, thirdly, it seems to conflict with the passages that call men to repentance and faith and those which say, “Whosoever will, let him taste, let him drink of the water of life freely.”

Because of these and other objections which our minds raise to the doctrine, we are tempted, if we can’t ignore the doctrine, to explain it away. We say, “**Well, God elects nations, but not individuals.**”

That is one way we try to get around it.

Well, I believe in election. I mean, it is there, but God elects *nations*, not individuals.

Well, what are nations but the groupings of individuals? And, furthermore, the Scripture indicates God elects *not just nations, but individuals*. He chose Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Noah, Ruth, Saul of Tarsus, Lydia, Jeremiah, etc.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit.” (2 Thes. 2:13)

Or we say, “God looks down from all eternity. He *sees* those who are going to believe and be holy and so *he chooses to save them*.”

In other words, *all election means is that God chooses to save those who believe*. He foresees those who will have saving faith and so he chooses to save them.

But the Scripture makes it clear that God does not elect us because of anything he sees in us, whether faith or good works. He doesn't save us because he foresees that we will be holy. He saves us *to make us holy*. He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world **that we should be holy** and without blame before him. He chose us that we should be holy (Ephesians 1)

Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9: God has "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."

God has called us with a holy calling *not according to our works*, but *according to his own purpose and grace* which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

"You may, therefore, safely infer, if he elected us in order that we might be holy, he did not elect us because he foresaw that we would be holy," wrote Calvin.

Secondly, he does not elect us because he foresaw that we would have faith. Acts 13:48 "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Election is not on account of our believing. Our believing is on account of our being elected.

To support this idea that God elects because of foreseen faith, many people point to Romans eight where the Scripture says, "For *whom He foreknew*, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

So some people say, "Well, see, he foreknew that they were going to be Christians and so he predestined them to be conformed to the image of his Son. He only predestined those people because he foreknew that they were going to believe."

But notice what the Scripture says. It doesn't say that he foreknew they would believe. The Scripture says he *foreknew us*.

"For **whom** He foreknew," those whom he did foreknow, know before hand, "He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."

To foreknow in that sense is to set his love upon, to forlove. Adam knew his wife Eve. He knew us beforehand. He set his love upon us.

The Scripture doesn't say he knew we would believe. The Scripture says he *foreknew us*, and he will say to others in the last day, "Depart from me. *I never knew you*."

Furthermore, faith is itself the gift of God. It does not come of ourselves.

Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Whether you take the “it” in this verse to refer to **faith** or to **the estate of salvation** into which faith ushers us, it is clearly **the gift of God**.

So we must conclude that *God chooses to save all those to whom he chooses to give the gift of faith.*

Spurgeon put it this way: “Others say, “God elected them **on the foresight of their faith.**””
Now, think about this. God gives faith. Therefore he could not have elected them on account of faith which he foresaw. There should be 20 beggars in the street and I determine to give one of them a shilling. But will anyone say that I determined to give that one a shilling, that I elected him to have the shilling, because I foresaw that he would have it? That would be talking nonsense. In like manner, to say that God elected men because he foresaw they would have faith, which is salvation in the germ, would be too absurd for us to listen to for a moment. Faith is the gift of God. Every virtue comes from him. Therefore it cannot have caused him to elect men, because it is his gift.

What, though a saint should be as holy and devout as Paul, what, though he should be as bold as Peter or loving as John, yet he would claim nothing from his maker.

“You **hath he made alive**, you **who were dead** in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1)

Theologian Boettner says:

“If the doctrine of Total Inability (Depravity) or Original Sin be admitted, the doctrine of unconditional election follows by the most inescapable logic. If, as the Scriptures and experience tell us, all men are by nature in a state of guilt and depravity from which they are wholly unable to deliver themselves, and they have no claim whatever on God for deliverance, it follows that if any are saved, God must choose out those who shall be the objects of his grace. (p. 95 Reformed Doctrine of Predestination)

Now let’s talk about this business of Calvinism v. Arminianism. First, some background information.

An **Armenian** is someone from *Armenia*. That is a place between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, a republic of the former Soviet Union. An Armenian may be an Arminian or a Calvinist or neither.

Arminian, however, is a name for those whose theology roughly follows that of **Jacob Arminius** who was a Dutch theologian opposed to this idea of total depravity and this whole concept of predestination. An Arminian believes that God’s election was based on our foreseen faith. God saw that we were going to have faith, as we were saying a moment ago, or God saw that we were going to be holy, and so he chose to save us. Or he saw that we were going to persevere to the end and so he chose to save us.

A **Calvinist**, on the other hand, is a term that we use for those whose theology roughly follows that of *John Calvin* who believed that God’s election was by grace alone, not because of anything God saw in us, not based on *faith* or *holiness* or *perseverance* of anything foreseen in an individual. It is **all of grace**.

There is a great section in C H Spurgeon's autobiography where he talks about this subject. He says, "I once attended a service where the text happened to be 'He shall choose our inheritance for us.' (Psalm 47:4) And the good man who occupied the pulpit was more than a little of an Arminian. Therefore when he commenced he said, 'This passage refers entirely to our temporal inheritance. It has nothing whatever to do with our everlasting destiny. For,' said he, 'we do not want Christ to choose for us in the matter of heaven or hell. It is so plain and easy that every man who has a grain of common sense will choose heaven and any person would know better than to choose hell. We have no need of any superior intelligence, or any greater Being, to choose heaven or hell for us. **It is left to our own free will, and we have enough wisdom given us**, sufficiently correct means to judge for ourselves.' Therefore, as he very logically inferred, there was no necessity for Jesus Christ or anyone to make a choice for us. We could choose the inheritance for ourselves without any assistance."

"Ah," I thought, "but my good brother, it may be very true that we *could*, but I think we should want something more than common sense before we *should* choose aright."

Why?

"Because men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil." (John 3:19)

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11)

We love darkness. And God has to change us, *take away that stony heart, give us a heart of flesh*, take away those *blind eyes* and give us *eyes that see*.

Scottish theologian William Cunningham put it this way. "The Calvinist would say, 'God's decree regarding a particular individual runs this way. I elect Peter to everlasting life, and in order that he may obtain everlasting life in the way I appointed, I will give him faith and holiness, and secure that shall persevere in them.' Whereas upon the Arminian theory, the decrees of election must run in this way: 'I elect to everlasting life all those men who shall believe and persevere. I foresee that Peter will believe and persevere, and therefore I elect him to everlasting life.'"

The fact is, as we will all learn in glory if not here, the *only reason* you will be in heaven, while perhaps a brother or sister or aunt or uncle or neighbor or friend will be in hell, is because God graciously set his love upon you---- because God from the beginning *chose you unto salvation*. And why did he choose you and not another? ----not because of anything good he foresaw in you, because there was nothing good in you when he set his love upon you. But as Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus, "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ, **according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace**. (Amen?)

Who is praised? If I realize that I am just a desperate sinner who deserves hell---in other words, if I am like a drowning man in the ocean, caught in a rip-tide and far from shore, and a lifeguard swims to me and saves me---who do I have to thank for it? The one who saved me!

To the praise of the glory of *his grace*.

In James 1:18 we read, “*Of His own will* He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.”

Now, the great objection to this biblical teaching, which leads even many who believe the Bible to try to find a way to deny it, is that, it seems to be, at least *at first hearing*, **unfair**. We all know God is fair. God is just. Is it not *unfair of God* to then save some and not all?

Yes, it might be unfair if we were not all deserving of hell.

Follow this reasoning now. If we were all innocent, sinless and God simply arbitrarily choose to take some of us to heaven and punish some of us in hell, we would have cause to say God is unfair. But given the fact—and it is the fact we have been given—that we have all grievously sinned against a holy God and we all deserve hell, it is not unfair for God, according to his own good pleasure, for reasons sufficient to himself to save some of us.

Author C. D. Cole wrote in The Bible Doctrine of Election: “All can see that a governor, by pardoning some men, does not harm others who are not pardoned. Those who are not pardoned are not in prison because the governor refused them a pardon, but because they were guilty of a crime against the state.”

I deserve hell for my sins. If God chose to send me there, that would only be justice. That God graciously, sovereignly opened my heart and gave me faith to believe in Christ and pluck me as a brand from the burning is *to his grace, his glory*. It is *all* of his grace.

It is supreme presumption for any man to accuse God of being unfair. That was Paul’s response in Romans nine where we read:

“Who are you, oh man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him that formed it, why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”

A potter if he wants to, can fashion a lump of clay into an ashtray, or a spittoon; or he can take that lump of clay and make a beautiful vase or statue.

The fact is, we are *already* defiled lumps of clay. That is what you have to understand. We are defiled lumps of clay. What we deserve is God’s wrath.

But doesn’t the Scripture say God is not willing that any should perish? Of course it says that. God is not willing that any should perish. He doesn’t will that any should perish in the same sense that a good judge doesn’t will or desire that anyone should ever have to be executed.

But if a defendant be found guilty, the righteous judge will sentence him though he takes no pleasure in it even as God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

“Yes,” you say, “But it is not in the power of the judge to change the heart of the defendant. It *is* in the power of God to change the heart of the sinner. **Why, then, does not he not do so? If God has the power to save some of us, why does he not save all of us?**”

Calvin writes, “Let us not hesitate to say with Augustine, ‘God could convert to good the will of the wicked because he is omnipotent. He did it to Saul of Tarsus, didn’t he? It is evident that he could. Why, then, does he not? Because he would not. *Why* he would not remains in himself.”

The Scripture hints at the answer in Romans 9: “For this very purpose I have raised you up [Pharaoh], that I may show my power in you and that my name may be declared in all the earth.” (v.17)

This is why I have raised you up, Pharaoh, that I might show my power in you and that my name might be declared in all the earth.

And then we read: “What if God, **wanting to show his wrath, and to make his power known**, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction...” (v. 22)

Listen. Get this point. It will help you. **It is not all about us.** This world is not all about us. It is not about your comfort, your pleasure, your happiness. It is not all about man. It is **God’s world**. We are the **creatures**. **He is the one to be glorified.** It is *his justice, his power, his might, his omnipotence that is to be glorified*. **It is not all about us.**

God elects us to eternal life.

Some people object: “Well, then his offer of salvation is not sincere. Doesn’t he say, ‘Whoever will let him come, let him take of the water of life freely’? He says, ‘All who seek will find.’ He says to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness they will be filled. If he knows that our hearts are hardened, our eyes are blind, we *will not come* and, indeed, because of our depravity we *cannot come*, is not his offer insincere?”

One theologian writes,

“If it is not inconsistent with God’s sincerity for him to command all men to love him, or command us all to be perfect, which he does, Matthew 5:48, it is not inconsistent with his sincerity for him to command us to repent and believe the gospel. A man may be altogether sincere in giving an invitation which he knows will be refused. A father who knows that his boys are going to do wrong nonetheless feels constrained to tell them what is right. His warnings and pleadings are sincere. The trouble is in the boys.” (Boettner)

Furthermore, *it is absolutely true* that whoever will repent and believe will be saved. It is a legitimate offer. God says, ‘Why will you die? Come let us reason together. Believe and be saved. Lay hold upon Christ. Put your faith in him and your sins will be forgiven.’

I don’t need to know, at the point at which I am *seeking* and *knocking* and *praying*, that it is the Spirit who is making me willing in the day of his power, that it is God who works in me both to will and do of his good pleasure. That fact doesn’t change the message. I feel myself under no constraint. As far as I can tell I am freely responding to the gospel message. I may not understand at that point that I am spiritually dead, and I can only repent and believe because God is supernaturally doing something inside of me. But that is not my present concern.

My present concern when the Spirit is dealing with me is that I am a sinner deserving hell, and by faith in Jesus Christ *I can be forgiven* and that is absolutely true.

A babe in Christ does not necessarily *know about*, much less *understand* God's sovereign election. But, listen. We are not to remain babes in Christ indefinitely. The time comes when we are to be ready for strong meat, Hebrews 5:

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)

Let me make this point clear. If you come to Christ, repent of your sins, believe the gospel, you will know that you are elect. You will know because no one could ever come to Christ if he were not elect.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Romans 8:29)

Now you say, **“I don't get it. Why preach? If God has already determined who is going to be saved, why preach, why send the gospel out, why send out missionaries?”**

Because **God tells us to preach the gospel and he tells us to go into all the world and preach this good news.**

Secondly, because it is **through the preaching of the gospel that God brings in his sheep.** It is through their response to the message of the gospel. There is a power in the gospel message. God uses that power to draw souls to himself.

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold,” Jesus said, “them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice.” (John 10:16)

How do you know which ones are the sheep? How do you know who is elect? How do you know who is ordained to eternal life?

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice.”

The ones that hear his voice are his sheep.

“As many as were ordained to eternal life...” do what? **Believe.**

Now, you say, “What practical effect does this business of election have upon me?”

First of all, Believer, it should cause you to fall on your knees and give praise to almighty God that he freely, mercifully poured out this grace upon you. Who are you? You are just *a sinner who deserves hell*. That is all---You were, in your natural state, one moment, *one breath* away from judgment. But God graciously entered your life and gave you a new heart, put you in a Christian family by his grace

where you could hear the gospel as a child; or brought a Christian into your life, or led you to sit under the power of the gospel as it was proclaimed. He brought you to saving faith.

“What was there in us that could merit esteem or give the Creator delight? It was even so, Father, we ever must say, because it seemed good in thy sight.”

Secondly, this truth in the Bible should *encourage you in evangelism* because you are just an instrument.

“I planted,” Paul said. “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:6)

What was it that kept these apostles going? How could Paul go from city to city and be stoned and chased away and beaten with rods and shipwrecked? What is it that kept him going? He knew that God would bless this message *in certain hearts*. He didn’t know which hearts. He knew there was a power in the gospel message and he knew that *the Lord had his sheep* and he knew that *his sheep would hear his voice* and that they would come to him.

Sometimes it was surprising who would come. Sometimes it was the Pharisees. Sometimes it was members of the Sanhedrin that would believe. Sometimes it was hard hearted Jews or Gentiles. But Paul knew that God would bless this message.

Thirdly, it should destroy all vestiges of pride in you and in me. It should destroy all those remaining vestiges of pride in us.

God saved you *not because of the good he saw you would do for his kingdom*, **but according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace.**

Let me close with one of my favorite passages from the life of C H Spurgeon. This passage was used of God to help awaken me to the truth of God’s election when I read it as a senior in college. It was my first year in a Christian school, my first year as a Christian.

Spurgeon said this. “Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea that the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths into my own soul----when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron. And I can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man---- that I made progress in scriptural knowledge through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God.

One weeknight when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher’s sermon, for I did not believe it.” (There may be some here like that right now). “The thought struck me. How did you come to be a Christian?

I sought the Lord.

“Well, how did you come to seek the Lord?

The truth flashed across my mind in a moment. I should not have sought him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek him.

I prayed, thought I. But then I asked myself, “How came I to pray?”

I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures.

How came I to read the Scriptures?

I did read them, but what led me to do so?

Then, in a moment I saw that **God was at the bottom of it all** and that he was the author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession. I ascribe my change wholly to God.

Christian, do you ascribe your change wholly to God? Do you realize that you were deserving of hell and if you are a believer today it is because God had compassion on you, opened your heart, and gave you faith to believe? You ought to be just as thankful to the Lord *for your life as a Christian as Lazarus was thankful to Christ for raising him from the dead.*

Lazarus had no more power to walk out of that tomb unless Christ empowered him than you have to become a Christian unless Christ gives you grace.

How about it, Christian? Do you ascribe your change wholly to God?

And if you have no assurance of salvation, if you have never yet repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ---I plead with you, as an ambassador of God, “Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near.” Let’s pray.

Father, these things are hard for mere humans to understand. Our minds are finite. Yours is infinite. We are not omnipotent. You are. We don’t know all things. You do. And we don’t have control over people’s hearts and minds and thoughts. You do. But, Lord, help us to believe what your Word says even when we can’t understand it, when we have trouble reconciling it to other scriptural truths. Give us faith to simply believe it and to say, “Lord, although I can’t comprehend it, you can and I can trust you.”

Lord, thank you for your mercy upon us. We know what we deserve, not to be living on this earth in comfort with the blessings of family and friends. But that first time we sinned against you, what we deserved was death. But you had mercy upon us not only have you extended our lives, but now you have brought this good news to us and opened our eyes and given us faith. Thank you. We praise your holy name for your incredible mercy and grace to us. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.