

“What it means to be Reformed”; Session # 17 – “Sola Gratia – God’s Loving Foreknowledge and Predestination”, Prepared for the Adult Sunday School class on November 23rd, 2014, by Pastor Paul Rendall.

Read Romans 8: 28-30

Two weeks ago now we began our study of the Doctrines of Grace by looking at the doctrine of Election. We will continue our study of election this morning by look at God’s loving foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is God’s most certainly knowing beforehand, all that He intended to do, through Jesus Christ our Lord, for the salvation of His Elect people. His knowing beforehand is knowing from before the foundation of the world, when He created all things.

1. Those who are chosen in Christ are chosen before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1: 1-4 Acts 15: 13-18

2. The doctrine of election, of God’s choosing some to eternal life, is based on God’s eternal decrees; and more specifically, the transaction which took place in eternity past between the Father and the Son in the Eternal Covenant of Redemption.

Isaiah 46: 8-11

3. It is because of His Special and Particular love toward them, that God’s elect are predestined to adoption as sons based on the work of Jesus Christ.

There is a general love of God for all of mankind because He has created them.

Revelation 4: 11 John 3: 16 1st Timothy 2: 2: 1-4 Luke 6: 35 and 36 Romans 2: 3 and 4

Then there is a Special and Particular love which God shows toward His Elect people..

Ephesians 1: 4-6 Jeremiah 31: 3 Deuteronomy 7: 6-10

There is a General love of God for all mankind because He created them and made them for His own good pleasure. This General love of God for all mankind is also shown toward all men everywhere in the preaching of Christ in the gospel to the whole world. This preaching is based upon His good-will toward all people in Christ. This is a will of desire in God, not His decretive will in relation to His Divine foreknowledge and purpose in saving specifically His Elect, His chosen, those whom He has determined to save from before the foundation of the world. The General love of God for sinners is based upon His goodness and kindness in presenting them with the means, through common grace, which will lead to their salvation if they will believe in Christ. We should understand that even though God shows common grace to a sinful person, the sin which is within them is still strong enough to overcome it, and their sin will work in their mind and heart to reject their need of Christ. Just coming to church and hearing the gospel will not guarantee that a person will be saved. Nevertheless, when a person believes in the gospel and prays to receive Christ, saving grace has already been given. The Holy Spirit has already been at work. That person has been given to Christ by the Father. Indeed the Father has been drawing them to Christ before they ever prayed. That person, from the moment that they

believe, they are saved. And that which has made the difference in their being able to spiritually see and hear, their being able and willing to repent and believe, is the fact that God has shown them mercy; He has given them saving grace.

This being given saving grace is the deliberate act of God, according to the loving foreknowledge of His eternal purpose; to show mercy where it was undeserved. The saving mercy shown to any person is shown to them according to God's loving foreknowledge of what He intended all along to do for them, from the foundation of the world. From the time of their birth to the time of their conversion they were a child of wrath even as the rest who have never savingly believed. But when they believe they spiritually become a child of God. The reasons why God chooses one person and not another are known only to Him and you and I who are mere men do not have the right to pry into the secrets of God, as to why God has chosen one person and passed by another, in regard to saving them. Neither those who are chosen, nor those who are passed by, are worthy of eternal life. They are all deserving of eternal condemnation.

4. All of God's elect were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God in respect to their salvation and all the means of saving grace, which would be used by Him to accomplish their salvation.

Romans 8: 28-30 1st Peter 1: 2

Romans 8: 28 – How can God cause all things to work together for good for those whom He effectually calls to Himself, unless He had loved them with an everlasting love, and had foreordained that all of these good and saving things would come to pass in time and space, at the time of His choosing? Those who are called here, are called according to God's purpose, and we might add – they are called according to His eternal purpose, as is mentioned in Ephesians chapter 1.

Matthew Henry says: "The privilege of the saints, that all things work together for good to them, that is, all the providences of God that concern them. All that God performs he performs for them, Psalm 57:2. ("I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me." "He shall send from heaven and save me; He reproaches the one who would swallow me up." "God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.") Matthew Henry goes on: Their sins are not of his performing, therefore not intended here, though his permitting sin is made to work for their good, 2nd Chronicles 32:31. ("However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart.") Henry continues: "But all the providences of God are theirs - merciful providences, afflicting providences, personal, and public. They are all for good; perhaps for temporal good, as Joseph's troubles; at least, for spiritual and eternal good. That is good for them which does their souls good. Either directly or indirectly, every providence has a tendency to the spiritual good of those that love God, breaking them off from sin, bringing them nearer to God, weaning them from the world, fitting them for heaven."

Paragraph 6 of Chapter 3 of our Confession says: "As God hath appointed the elect unto eternal glory, so He hath, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto, wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed in Christ.

Romans 8: 29 and 30 – “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.” God knew before the foundation of the world who He would choose, and as such He predestined them to be the recipients of the grace of His calling them through the gospel savingly. This call would be to their being conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ; their being given a New Heart, eternal life and saving strength so that they over time would be transformed to become righteous and holy. Christ’s righteousness and His holiness, and His death for their sins, and His resurrection from the dead would be the basis of this good work of the Spirit of God. Christ would be the firstborn among many brethren.

Notice that there is a very definite order in God’s salvation of His elect. God foreknows what He intends to do in saving every one of His Elect. God predestines His elect to grace and eternal glory, appointing all the means to that end. And then at His time in each of their lives, He calls them with an effectual call; gives them regenerating grace whereby they are convinced that they should place their trust in Christ, and having done so, then, they are justified. And for those thus saved, He will also glorify them on the last Day.

Look at **1st Peter 1: 1 and 2** – “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”

The Pulpit Commentary says this on this verse – “It is interesting to note that the substantive “foreknowledge” (πρόγνωσις) occurs nowhere else in Holy Scripture except in St. Peter’s Pentecostal speech (Acts 2:23). We mark the agreement of St. Peter and St. Paul (comp. Rom_8:29, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son;” comp. also Romans 11:2 and 2nd Timothy 2: 19). Election is “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”; but not simply, as the Arminians taught, *ex praevisis meritis* (by foreseen merits); for we cannot separate foreknowledge and predestination; the foreknowledge of an Almighty Creator must imply the exercise of choice and will; what he knows, that he also willeth; God does the electing. Thus in 1st Peter 1:20 “foreknown”, the more exact rendering of the Revised Version must imply the “foreordained” of the old translation. But that foreknowledge is the foreknowledge of God the Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but our Father also. He careth for his children; we must trust in him. The potter makes one vessel for honor, another for dishonor; but he makes none for destruction. A veil of awful mystery hangs round the relations which exist between the Almighty and his creatures; but “God is Love.”

Turn with me over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 8-11 – “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice here that it is not God’s will that any Christian fall away and end up in hell. God’s appointment for everyone who believes in Jesus is that they will obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Dear Christian, this is truly reason to take heart. “Christ Jesus died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

5. God’s choice in election is not based upon anything good or bad in those whom He has foreknown.

A. The Bible teaches us that God saves His elect one at a time. And He does not necessarily choose to save all within a family. (Although sometimes in the book of Acts we find whole households of people who trusted in Christ at the same time. We will speak of this later.) Jacob and Esau were both sinful young men; both were totally depraved. God did not choose to save Jacob because he was an upright young man, or because he was a better person by nature than Esau.

We should also see from these verses that Jacob was not chosen because of foreseen faith that he would exercise. Before his conversion he was a very tricky and deceitful man. His name Jacob meant “Supplanter”, or “deceitful”. He stole his brother Esau’s birthright by cunningly taking advantage of his brother’s hunger. (Genesis 25: 29-34) He stole his brother Esau’s blessing by going along with his mother’s sneaking plan to trick Isaac into thinking that he was Esau, bringing him food, whereupon Isaac did give Jacob his special spiritual blessing even though he had not intended it. (Genesis 27: 1-29) I hope that you can see, and that you are convinced, that Jacob was not chosen because God foresaw some good thing in him that he would do to merit his salvation. God had to take 20 years of Jacob’s life to straighten out his heart, after his conversion in order that he could learn the right way to go about living righteously. (Genesis 28-33)

Thus we see that God’s choosing of any person, to set His love upon them, to save them, does not take place on the basis of their having done anything good or bad. It is simply that God is showing mercy where He wills to do so, for reasons that we do not understand; reasons which relate to His own purpose which is to glorify Himself in the salvation of some; and to glorify Himself in the demonstration of His justice in others. His purpose according to election will stand.

A paraphrase of verses 10-13: “When Rebecca had conceived by Isaac, the children having been conceived by her had not done anything good or evil; in order that the purpose of God according to election might stand (that salvation was not by their works in any respect, but rather that it comes from God who first chooses them, and then He effectually calls that person to salvation), God said to Rebecca, “The older son shall serve the younger.” And this distinction which God made between these two persons, Jacob and Esau, in His choosing one, Jacob, and His rejecting the other, Esau, in this case extended even to their descendants and what God would make of them as nations. Just as it is written in the book of Malachi, chapter 1, verse 2 – “I have loved you,” says the Lord.” “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” says the Lord.” “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountain and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.”

B. Election is solely based upon God’s purpose, which is, to show mercy on certain individuals and even certain nations.

Genesis 26: 21-23 Malachi 1: 1-5

Let us understand that the purpose of God according to election starts before a person is born. God creates all things and all people for His purpose. He forms each and every person who has ever lived, according to His good pleasure; physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Let's look at God's choice of Jeremiah, from the womb, to be saved and to become a prophet to the nations: Jeremiah 1: 4-12

But in His wisdom and according to His eternal purpose, He has not chosen to save all men. Even though all are sinners, all will not be saved. Could God have saved all men? Undoubtedly He has the power to do so. But this would not have brought glory to Him in regard to the greatness of His attributes in relation to the purposes of His redeeming a people. Those whom He has chosen are saved to the praise of His glorious mercy and grace. Those whom He passed by and does not choose to eternal life perish forever because of their sins. Their eternal destruction they have brought upon themselves, and God's bringing them under His eternal justice in punishing them eternally will be to the praise of His glorious justice. Psalm 76: 1-12

We want to look first at His merciful choice to save many people who were undeserving unworthy sinners. And after that we will look at the doctrine of reprobation which is His passing by the others whom He did not elect, bringing them to judgment on account of their sins. First we need to see that God's purpose in election is to save a multitude of people whom no man can number.

Revelation 7: 9-12

C. God is also able to save many people at a certain and particular time period of His choosing.

We should see here that God's purpose in election included the election of the nation of Israel, and not the nation of people which descended from Esau; those who became the Edomites. In New Testament, New Covenant times, God has, through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile making them one new man in His Church.

Ephesians 2: 14-16

And He has established each individual believer in Himself as being part of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that we might proclaim the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1st Peter 2: 9 and 10
We also find that God is able to save whole households of people at the same time if it is His purpose to do so.

Acts 11: 13-15 Acts 16: 31-34

Just because these individual and family conversions have been God's regular way of doing things over the course of this Church age thus far, it does not mean that God has not purposed in electing love to save much larger numbers, even through electing whole nations in relation to their receiving the gospel of His Son so that Christ's kingdom will some triumph in the earth. It is evident from many passages of Scripture that eventually He will call the Jews as a nation, as an ethnic people, to Himself. (Romans 11: 25-29) This is not dispensationalism. Rather, it is the extension of His electing work to a greater level of saving many people, and even the majority of whole nation groups, so that they will be generally seen as Christian nations in the latter times of this present dispensation. The pouring out of God's Spirit, to give success to the preaching of the gospel, will someday result in the conversion of nations to Christ. Even though

many Christians do not presently believe this, they should carefully study the following passages and ask themselves whether any of these great things have yet come to pass in the history of the Church.

Isaiah 2: 1-4 Isaiah 59: 20 – 60: 12 Isaiah 19: 18-25 Isaiah 26: 1-3

Zechariah 2: 10-13 Zechariah 8: 20-23 Ezekiel 39: 21-29

The Savoy Confession of 1658 says this in its 26th Chapter, Paragraph 5 –

“As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.”

6. God’s electing of some persons to eternal life, and His rejection of others, leaving them in their sins, has a different basis of consideration in His holy mind.

God, who has created all men, permitted the Fall of all men in the first man Adam. In the decree of election God saw all men fallen in Adam, and He exercised His sovereign right to show undeserved mercy to some in electing them to eternal life. But in the decree of reprobation (His rejection of all the others whom He has not chosen) He has shown His just and holy determination to pass them by and not show them mercy. He does this, not because He is cruel or unfeeling in relation to the non-elect, but because He knows that they truly deserve to be punished eternally, having loved their sin more than God. In this act of preterition, God determined before the foundation of the world, even from eternity to leave them to themselves and their sins; and according to His justice, He then determines to punish them for all of their sins, which they justly deserve.

Turn with me over to 1st Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 8-11 – “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice here that it is not God’s will that any Christian fall away and end up in hell. God’s appointment for everyone who believes in Jesus is that they will obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Dear Christian, this is truly reason to take heart. “Christ Jesus died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

Why does God appoint certain people to wrath? It is for their sins, not because He arbitrarily created them to destroy them.

Jeremiah 5: 27-30 Proverbs 16: 4 Romans 9: 17-24

William G.T. Shedd – Dogmatic Theology, Vol. 1, P. 433 is very good on this subject.

7. God's choice of every person who would be saved (the elect) is according to the pleasure of God's will, not your will as a man or woman.

Ephesians 1: 5 and 6 Matthew 11: 25-30 John 1: 12 and 13 Romans 9: 16-18

Our own 1689 London Baptist Confession says in Chapter 3, Paragraph 5 – “Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel of the 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.”

James 1: 18

8. It is God's election of these particular persons, in connection with the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, which forms the basis of God's conveying all the blessings of grace to them.

Romans 8: 28-30 1st Thessalonians 1: 1-5

9. Let's remember that all those who are chosen are chosen in Christ, and that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is called God's elect.

Therefore we ought to glory in being called the elect of God, and we ought to be willing to endure all things for their sakes in our service to Christ.

Isaiah 42: 1-9 1st Peter 2: 4 and 5 2 Timothy 2: 8-10