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Reformation  
& Revival



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This is an age of religious activism: we greatly concern ourselves over what our churches are *doing* rather than what our churches *are*. Most Christians are too busy to worship, and many church services are so filled with man-made promotion that God is almost forgotten. People go to church to be spectators at a religious program, not participants in spiritual worship. They spend their time counting, but not weighing! As long as there are “results” nobody cares whether or not God was pleased as His people gathered to honor Him and offer Him spiritual worship. Multitudes of Christian workers (including pastors) wear themselves out on the weekly religious treadmill, gradually growing weary of soul and all the while wondering what is wrong with their spiritual lives. The end is collapse—spiritually, physically and emotionally. The missing ingredient is *worship*—ascribing to God worth and not “using God” to promote the results we have already planned.

*Warren W. Wiersbe*

We leave our places of worship, and no deep and inexpressible wonder sits on our faces. We can sing these lilting melodies; and when we get out into the streets our faces are one with the faces of those who have left the theatres and music halls. There is nothing about us to suggest that we’ve been looking at anything stupendous and overwhelming. Far back in my boyhood I remember an old saint telling me that after some services he liked to make his way home alone by quiet bypaths, so that the hush of the Almighty might remain on his awed and prostrated soul. That is the element we are missing.

*J. H. Jowett*

Election by a sovereign God was one of the mainstay doctrines in the preaching used by God during great days of Awakening. Will it be preached today? Should it be preached today? In our last article in this series on important doctrines needed in seasons of revival we turn to this important and humbling truth.

During the revival ministry of Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) more than 25,000 were converted, principally in the New England area. According to John Thornbury this figure would be about 600,000 if percentaged to our present population.<sup>1</sup> Nettleton, for one, did not shrink back from proclaiming a God who elected. This vignette comes from the book on his life by his dear friend Bennet Tyler.

A certain individual said to him: “I cannot get along with the doctrine of election.” “Then,” said Nettleton, “get along without it. You are at liberty to get to heaven the easiest way you can. Whether the doctrine of election is true or not, it is true that you must repent, and believe, and love God. Now, what we tell you is, that such is the wickedness of your heart, that you never will do these things unless God has determined to renew your heart. If you do not believe that your heart is so wicked, make it manifest by complying with the terms of salvation. Why do you stand cavilling with the doctrine of election? Suppose you should prove it to be false, what have you gained? You must repent and believe in Christ after all. Why do you not immediately comply with these terms of the gospel? When you have done this, without the aids of divine grace, it will be soon enough to oppose the doctrine of election. Until you shall have done this, we shall still believe that the doctrine of election lies at the foundation of all hope in your case.”<sup>2</sup>

I concur. Election by a sovereign God is “at the foundation of all hope.” It is this election which we wish to explore in the

next few pages. There can be no question that the Bible speaks of election. In fact, God says that we are elect before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Are we willing to express what the Bible says about His sovereignty?

Let me introduce this subject of the sovereignty of God in salvation by writing out the statement a friend of mine often uses: "God saves sinners." To put it so that the emphasis is not misunderstood perhaps it should be written: *God saves sinners*. Thus the Initiator of salvation is given greater visibility. He does it all. But to fail to emphasize the word "sinners" would make the sovereignty of God seem less gracious, so we will write it: *God saves sinners!* Will that do? No, because the action God takes toward us is too precious and freeing to be diminished in the least. So, let us write a completely italicized version: *God saves sinners!* Then we must underline it—and continue to underline it without ever becoming casual or passive with the theme!

I start out like this because I want us to see that when we are emphasizing the sovereignty of God in salvation, we are bringing something home that is dear to those of us who know ourselves to be sinners. The sovereignty of God caused grown men like Paul to rip loose in doxologies of praise as if his heart were pulsating through his pen (Rom. 11:33-36); it causes angels to break forth in paeans of joyful adoration as described in the Revelation (Rev. 4:11); and it has more than once brought me to my knees and filled my eyes with tears of thankfulness. It is the sinner that God's sovereignty affects.

But there is a sobriety which God's sovereignty brings to the salvation issue, explaining in part just why I have included it in that set of doctrines which have been used so effectively in historic revival. The seriousness has to do with the awful prospect that one may *not* be chosen—that God's converting grace may *not* be given. In days when this doctrine was preached under the power of the Spirit, there

was compelling reason for a sinner to ask if he or she was included among the elect. When a man like Paul in the New Testament Awakening, Luther and the others of the Reformation, Jonathan Edwards or George Whitefield of the Great Awakening, or Asahel Nettleton of the early 1800s revivals, held out these truths, people feared a God that had a will and the power to exercise it.

Contrary to accepted belief, persons under some measure of conviction in days of revival were not prone to dally away their opportunities for a good eternity when they heard preaching on the premise that God's sovereign will must be accomplished without fail—more likely they were prone to plead for mercy. This is the way of conviction of those times. It was not *que sera sera*. They did not so much question God as themselves.

This doctrine could produce apathy, but then so could any doctrine. Apathy sometimes has more to do with the ineffectiveness of the preacher than the doctrine. God says we are to make sure of His calling and electing us (2 Peter 1:10). I suggest, though, that a person dropping his interest in pursuing salvation by the excuse of God's sovereignty is giving signs of an insensitivity which is more characteristic of the non-elect. It shows little concern for the soul, little belief in the consequence of sin, little assurance of hell's reality. In short, for a person to fail to be interested in his election, to really put off thinking of himself in the light of it as he is faced with it, is gross foolishness. It shows he was never really that concerned anyway.

Belief in the sovereignty of God in electing some sinners to eternal salvation and therefore passing over other sinners (all of whom are deserving of hell, by the way) is not a belief that exists only in the way-out fringes of Christianity. Below are listed some names of those who preached and wrote it. Now do not think that the belief of others in history establishes any doctrine. A list could be made on the other

side. But it does help to say that we are not alone in our interpretation of Scripture, the Scripture being of “no private interpretation.” This is not a new doctrine—forgotten, yes—but not new. So I will start the list with Christ and Paul, Peter, John, and the others, and continue it with these:

Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Ussher, Lightfoot, virtually all the King James Version translators, Beza, Brainerd, Edwards, Whitefield. Carey, Fuller, Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, and China Inland Mission missionaries. Matthew Henry, Martin Luther, John Brown, Joseph Caryl, Thomas Chalmers, Alexander Maclaren, John Gill, Bishop Hall, Charles Hodge, Bishop Leighton, Thomas Manton, Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, G. Campbell Morgan, Matthew Poole, Bishop Reynolds, William Gurnall, J.C. Ryle, John Trapp, Robert Haldane, C.H. Spurgeon and Thomas Scott.<sup>3</sup>

We could add a host many others, including George Mueller, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and several prominent authors and preachers of today. All of this listing is again just to say that a person who genuinely interprets Scripture as giving God supreme sovereignty over who is and who is not saved does not mean that he or she is in a freakish minority of irrelevant theologs. Yet, as I said, the important thing is whether Scripture teaches the doctrine. So let’s look carefully in John chapter six. I shall attempt to make a brief argument for the sovereignty of God in choosing those He wishes out of this text principally. This will not be an exhaustive, systematic study but a textual one nonetheless.

We must think of this issue of the dispensing of eternal life as a three-legged stool. Not a short stool, like the Victorian “cricket.” Breaking a leg of that stool and falling off would not matter much. No, it is a tall stool, way above the clouds. To lose one leg of this stool in our understanding is

to fall into doctrinal inaccuracy and misrepresentation. Each leg then is representing one irreducible action bringing salvation to men. In John six we find these three actions are as follows: God’s giving certain men to Christ (v. 37), the Father’s drawing men to Christ (v. 44), man’s believing in Christ (v. 47).

Let’s begin then with the last statement concerning our topic and move to the first in the order of the text. That is, we shall move from man’s action to God’s action. This is the more gentle way.

#### Leg One: Man Believes

Jesus had been describing Himself as the Bread of Life or the Manna from God, before a large group of interested people. As the conversation progressed, some of the Jews began grumbling and asking questions among themselves (vv. 41-42). It is while speaking to their grumbling that Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” (vv. 47, 51a).

Now here is a point of agreement between those who believe in sovereign election based on God’s purposeful choice beginning with Himself alone, and those who believe in it based on God’s knowledge of man’s choice: man must believe. Here is the first leg of this enormous stool. Without belief on man’s part there is no salvation. “How, then, can they call upon the one they have not believed in?” (Rom. 10:14).

If my car were inoperative and I went to the mechanic for help, I would have to hand over the keys. That is my action of trust in the mechanic. It is *fides vive*—living faith. Without doing that, all my talk about the competency of the mechanic results in nothing. And so, without our giving the keys of life over to Christ, we have never really trusted. This is Bible belief simply stated.

But if we stop at man's believing we have a real distortion. We have created in our understanding a big man and a small God: a strong and able man choosing his destiny and a weak God who does not determine but simply waits on man. In fact, we have a very frustrated God. He wrings His hands waiting for capricious man to decide for Him. He begs a little—but not too much, for then He would overpower man's will. He is sovereign, but sovereign over what? Certainly nothing to do with man's will. The weather maybe. If salvation is determined by man's believing alone, then God is not sovereign, but man is.

You may say that God's sovereignty is exercised in restricting Himself to submit to man's will except when He necessarily must step in to keep long-term promises going the right direction. I find this problematic from two directions. The relation of one event to another necessitates that God be sovereign over every individual matter of the universe. This we could term the Law of Contiguity. One event is contiguous to another in such a way that the later event could not take place without the former. Thus, to say that God determines one action, such as the failure of one car to hit another car (that's why you said, "Thank you, Lord,"—because you believed God did it) means that the event just before was orchestrated by God as well (the scream from the wife who woke up the sleepy driver). If then all events are in some way contiguous, to get one event done, God must control all; if God determines all, He determines who is and who is not converted.

#### **Leg Two: God Draws Sinners**

Now we come to the second leg: God's drawing of the sinner to Christ. In John 6:44 we read: "No one can come to Me unless the father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Now, again, we all must agree that it takes God to draw

the sinner to Christ. Has any one of you come without God's intervention? The reason you must come through God's intervention is that you are a man or woman dead in your sins (Eph.2:1). This inability (Rom.3:10-18) is complete in that it affects all of your faculties. For a sinner to come to Christ without God's luring him in would be tantamount to a humpbacked whale flying through the air. First of all, the whale does not *want* to fly—it is not his environment ("No man seeks God"); and if he wanted to fly, he would not know how ("No man understands"); and if he wanted to, and understood how to, he *could* not because he would not be able to ("No man does good, not even one") (Rom. 3:10-12).

Thomas Hooker said:

The will of natural man is the worst part about him. The worst thing he has, the greatest enemy he has, is his own heart and will. It is the corrupt will of a man that keeps him under the power of his sins, and keeps him off the power of an ordinance that would procure his everlasting good. I speak it the rather to dash that dream of wicked men, when they do ill, and speak ill, yet (say they), "my heart is good." No, truly, if thy life be naught, thy heart is worse. It is the worst thing thou hast about thee . . . the deceitfulness of the heart is above all; the masterfulness of the heart is beyond all that we can conceive. A man may discern a man's life, "but the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." The will of man is uncontrollable, it will stand out against all reasons and arguments, and nothing can move the will except God work upon it.<sup>4</sup>

The word *draw* in John 6:44 is, in fact, the word "drag." The dragging could be likened to that of Lot who was dragged away with "cords of love" from Sodom. No one will come to Christ without the Father dragging him. But this drawing is in the form of "an inward disposing of the soul to

come to Christ.”<sup>5</sup> As Luther said:

The drawing is not like that of the executioner, who draws the thief up the ladder to the gallows; but is a gracious allurements, such as that of the man whom everybody loves, and to whom everybody willingly goes.

So to be drawn is to be moved by the Spirit to have what you do not have naturally, a desire or affection for Christ. We are not here speaking of a desire that is surface, but one that is deep—a desire for Christ that is related to who He is, His loveliness and beauty (Phil. 3:7-10).

All of us in evangelicalism believe that man must believe and God must draw. But how many does He draw? That is the question and the place where God’s sovereignty is most evident.

### Leg Three: God Selectively Elects

The statement about which we are concerned is found in John 6:37. “All that the father *gives* Me will come to Me and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away” (ital. mine).

Here we find selectivity. Man believes to receive eternal life; man must be drawn to that place of belief. But does God draw everyone? The answer from the passage is clearly negative. Let me put down the context:

All that the Father *gives* Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but to do the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. For My Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (37-40. Italics mine).

The Father “has” some persons and “gives” them to the Son in order that the Son may give them eternal life, never losing them, but raising up on the last day all that are given Him. God’s will, after all, is that these “given” ones have *eternal* life. Whoever is given is brought to Christ and kept. Does this include everyone? Is everyone “given” to the Son? I think it is impossible to get around the fact that Jesus is describing a select few. The progress of the action goes plainly from the Father to the Son to the person. As Jesus said, “All that the Father gives to Me *will* come to Me. . .”, thus putting the initiatory action in the Father’s court (italics mine).

This “having” and “giving” of the Father is seen in John 17 as well.

Father, the time has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify You. For You granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have *given* Him (vv. 1b-2. Italics mine).

The giving of eternal life is for those who believe, but first they must be “given” to the Son by the One who has them. Look further.

I have revealed You to those Whom You gave Me out of the world. They were Yours; You *gave* them to Me and they have obeyed Your word. Now they know that everything You have given Me comes from You. For I gave them the words You gave Me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from You, and they believed that You sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those You have *given* Me, for they are Yours. . . . My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one. . . . Father, I want those You have *given* Me to be with

Me where I am, and to see the glory You have given Me because You loved Me before the creation of the world (vv. 6-9, 20-21a, 24. Italics mine).

Here again, the message is articulated with rich simplicity. God *has* certain ones in His heart from eternity, and those specific ones and no others are *given* to the Son, who then does certain necessary things for them in order to secure eternal life. So 100 percent of those given are secured by Christ, and not one less or more. To say that they were the Father's *because* they believed is to completely distort the language. They rather believe because they were given to the Son. The Son then died for them, revealed Himself to them, prayed for them, etc. They believed precisely *because* they were "given" ones. The others did not believe but "were of their father the devil" (John. 8:44).

You say, don't men have the ability to reject the gospel? Yes. In fact they always reject the gospel as natural men (1 Cor. 2:14). It is because of this rejection that God necessarily must elect and procure certain ones through Christ. Without God's election, the Son's intervention, the Spirit's revealing of the Son, etc., they would be left to their rejection alone. Therefore, God in His love arranged that some would be so changed, wooed, lured, and inwardly motivated, that they would irresistibly come to Him. Their wills are not violated but are rather won over decisively by the process of drawing to Christ. All the rest of mankind gets what they naturally desire—which is not Christ.

Now we can understand the passage in Acts 13:48 as simply restating the order from God's perspective. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

These three actions make a secure stool or platform for understanding the gospel. In summary they are as follows:

God's giving to the Son those He has elected in love eternally; the Father's drawing of these elected ones to the Son in an irresistible fashion; and the individual believing in Christ. I must not imply that everytime the gospel is given it must include a full orb'd discussion of these three elements, but the evangelist must be sure of them or else what does come out will be man-centered.

### Two Questions

Such a matter as God's choosing certain ones to be converted and passing over the rest certainly raises some questions. Here are just two of many which could be asked: 1. Is God's election leading to an irresistible drawing fair? 2. Isn't God's election based on foreknowledge or prescience?

#### 1. Is Election Fair?

We answer this in the negative. No, it is not fair for God to elect some and pass over others. God is not fair in virtually any area. You were not born in the desert of Somalia, for instance. That is not fair. Some of you were endowed with certain physical characteristics or mental characteristics, differentiating yourself from others as to ability. God's love for variety seen in creation itself is an indication of God's feeling no compulsion to be fair. God *is* just and merciful. But these two qualities are worlds apart from fairness.

What do I mean? We live in a day when fairness is constantly argued. Everyone who feels he or she represents a minority position or group begs for equal public access. The courts have tried to satisfy everyone's feelings of equity to the point of the ridiculous. So for us to think that God is not fair is to make God "politically incorrect." But fairness is not in the definition of God. Justice is. Fairness, as it is understood by most, is the making of all things equally accessible (or, as applied to our discussion, the

giving of everyone for all time equal access to God, or, the theory that all are equally drawn and equally influenced by God to come to Christ). To give justice is to award what is exactly correct as far as penalty or reward according to the behavior. Now God is just—impeccably so (Deut. 32:4). God has never failed to punish one sin or to reward one true deed of righteousness. The just punishment of all sins has either fallen on Christ or on the sinner. In the final judgment of the damned, sins, every one of them, will be judged as still being the responsibility of the unconverted person (Rev. 20:11-15). But the saved will find themselves fully acquitted by the death of Christ for their every last sin (Rom. 8:1). Sin therefore is fully dealt with by a very careful God. God never fails to be just in this sense.

God is also merciful. He has been merciful toward the elect, yet not without justice being fully met in the death of Christ. In another broader sense He is merciful toward all. By giving rain on the righteous *and* the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45), and by tolerating the non-believer and even giving him some happiness, etc., He shows His mercy. This we call common grace. Now the Scripture says something about the mercy of salvation: “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion’” (Rom. 9:15).

So we find that God’s mercy salvifically does not come to all but only to some. In this God’s mercy and His justice come to man apart from considerations of fairness. Though He is not fair, He cannot be accused of being unjust or unloving.

Remember that the practical way that the sovereignty of God works out in terms of salvation is through God’s drawing the individual to Christ who would most assuredly continue to run from Christ on his own (John. 3:19-20). God therefore gives the man without Christ what he wants and the one coming to Christ what he wants, which is Christ Himself.

The drawing of certain ones to Christ is irresistible in the final sense. When all the supposed disciples of Christ left at the hard teaching of Christ on His sovereignty, He said, “This is why I told you, no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled him” (John 6:65). Then He turned to His chosen men and asked, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Do you remember their answer? “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (vv. 67-68). There really is no other place to go when we are drawn by the Father to Christ. Others can leave, but the chosen one cannot. He will come to Christ and be kept to the end, as Christ promised. He will raise him up on the last day.

Remember that when Paul brought up a third party contention that God’s election was not fair, God answered with firmness. Note:

One of you will say to Me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?” But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who 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? (Rom. 9:19-21).

## 2. Foreknowledge vs. Foreordination

The next question is: Isn’t election based on foreknowledge? It is commonly held that the resolution to this issue of God’s predestination is that it is based upon prescience or foreknowledge in the sense of just knowing beforehand. Because God sees the sinner believing in Him, He elects him to salvation. We will call this the “pre-sight” view.

Let us readily admit that the idea of God’s knowing beforehand is prevalent in the biblical writings (Ps. 139:1-4, 15-16, etc.). God knows the end from the beginning. But it is also held by Scripture that God foreordains or decrees all that comes to pass (Lam. 3:37-38; Ps. 33:11; Acts 17:26, etc.).

So we have two philosophical ideas put in the same arena. Which of the ideas leads the salvation process?

The following statements are my rationale for believing that the pre-sight view is deficient.

Let's look at the principal passage on foreknowledge and salvation, Romans 8:29, for help: "For those God *foreknew* He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers" (italics mine).

J.P. McBeth, a Baptist theologian, said:

God is omniscient and knows everything. He has known everything from the beginning. Nothing is a surprise to God, nor does he ever come into possession of new knowledge. Thus God knows all people. But this word means more than an intellectual knowledge. It means that God knows some in a special way, in grace, in life from eternity. This is the initiative of our salvation. Redemption has its rise in God and not in man.

These observations may help us see the reason for preferring the determination of God as the basis of election rather than prescience. The word *foreknowledge* is actually better understood as "thought of endearingly beforehand," or "foreloved," or "foreordained with forethought." Here's why:

1. The foreknowledge spoken of is foreknowledge of persons, not events. The statement reads, "*whom* He foreknew..." You see this as well in Romans 11:2, speaking of His endearment to Israel: "God did not reject His people, *whom* he foreknew" (italics mine). Therefore we can deduce that foreknowledge as related to salvation is not just seeing a person's conversion experience prior to election and therefore electing on the basis of the individual's choice. It is a foreloving of *persons*.

2. The pre-sight view of election makes God seem absurd

in His language, if not somewhat dishonest. You see, God has gone to great lengths to say that some are elected, chosen, foreordained, predestined as part of His eternal purpose. For God to say that He saw those that would choose Him and then call them elect (select from a number) is linguistic trickery. It is like the queen decreeing that the sun will rise in the morning. God's words about His action toward man would mean nothing but could only be construed as a way of presenting an authoritative front that God is in charge, when the decisions of eternal life and death are really within man alone.

Apply this to prophecy. Much of prophecy is presented to us as that which God determines to do in the future. Is this the truth of it? Did God prophesy that John the Baptist would be the forerunner of the Messiah (Isa. 40:3-5; Luke 3:3-6) on the basis of pre-sight, and then declare that it would happen? Doesn't language lose all meaning to say that? Does it not make sense of the language to say that the action predicted was based on God's determined plan and not just what He saw happening?

3. As a philosophical idea, God's decreeing of a thing has dominance over His seeing a thing beforehand. Even though we are learning that the word *foreknowledge* is more than pre-sight, we nonetheless cannot disregard the verity that God sees all things beforehand. Thus God's seeing all things has forever been a reality to Him, and God's determining all things has also been forever. These two have had eternal origins, neither one preceding the other. As long as He has decreed, he has known; and as long as He has known, He has decreed. So, in one sense, we cannot put one philosophical idea ahead of the other in terms of time. Yet we can put one above the other in terms of dominance. If God has seen and determined at the same time, we cannot make His decreeing subservient to His knowing. The reason one is preceding the other in terms of force (not time) is that determination

is a willful act of God, whereas seeing is a passive act. God cannot help but see all, but He wills to decree. Therefore what He determines, He sees; and what He sees, is determined. The force of decreeing a thing dominates the seeing of the same.

4. The word *foreknowledge* in the passage considered above and in the other similar passage, 1 Peter 1:2, is rendered by most Bible translators as “forelove” and “foreordination” (or similar wording), rather than as simple pre-sight—even by some who hold differing views of God’s election. In other words, the language and context of Scripture call for such a meaning to be attached to the word. Consider the following:

“For those whom He had marked out from the first” (Goodspeed). “For those on whom He set His heart beforehand” (Williams). “For those whom God chose from the first” (The Century N.T.). “Whom God the Father has predestined and chosen” (Moffat on 1 Peter 1:2). “Chosen of old in the purpose of God the Father” (New English Bible).

5. And finally, to believe in the pre-sight view represents a reversal of normal biblical order. There are many verses that state man’s believing results in eternal life (John. 3:36; Rom. 10:9, etc.). This is the truth as far as it goes. Yet behind that believing there are those verses which teach that God must have elected the person to be a believer. These reveal the doctrine of election as the basis upon which man has the ability to believe. Consider:

“All who were appointed for eternal life, believed” (Acts 13:48). “You do not believe because you are not My sheep” (John 10:26). “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16). “It is because of Him that you are in Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:30). “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

As Arthur C. Custance said, “Either God is sovereign and election is an expression of God’s will, or man is sovereign

and election is an expression of God’s foreknowledge.”

More questions as to the nature of election come immediately to the mind. As we explore the work of God on behalf of sinners, keep in mind the heart of John Calvin. “I desire only that we should not investigate what the Lord has left hidden in secret, nor neglect what He has brought out into the open, so that we may not be convicted of excessive curiosity on the one hand, or of excessive ingratitude on the other.”<sup>6</sup>

I must ask now, will you preach and teach the truth that God saves sinners? Will you be faithful to the Scripture as you see it? Will you speak without fear of man?

I know many men and women who are deathly afraid of preaching this doctrine because of the self-sufficiency of their peers. This man-fearing spirit has done much to steal from the gospel its God-centeredness in our age. We are reaping the results, for we now live in a virtual dust bowl of activity with little to show for it.

I do not say that we should preach this doctrine as if it were the only thing to say. It does permeate other doctrines, that is true. It permeates like dye with cloth. Yet, we must make something of it as the text makes something of it. When the Bible says that a man must believe (leg one), let us preach that faithfully. Jesus did not refer to His sovereignty at every occasion with non-believers. Yet also remember that the books of the Bible were written to be read as a whole, including both the doctrinal and hortatory, the horizontal and the vertical, the lofty and the practical, etc. This awareness will help guide us in our presentation of doctrine by forcing us to undergird the admonitions of Scripture with the doctrines which accompany, and vice versa.

In the final place we should remember that the doctrine of election is principally for the good of those who hear. It says that sinners may be saved. It says that those without

hope have hope in God's love. Though fears may come when one considers the implications of being non-elect, it is most certainly a positive doctrine.

It was the theologian Augustus H. Strong who reminds us of election's beauty:

Election and sovereignty are only sources of good. Election is not a decree to destroy, it is a decree to save. When we elect a president, we do not need to hold a second election to determine that the remaining millions shall be non-presidents.

- 1 John Thornbury, *God Sent Revival*, p. 233. Welwyn, Herts, England: Evangelical Press, 1977.
- 2 Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *The Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton*, p.405. Reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975,
- 3 Jay Green, "Calvinism Today," a foreword to *The Five Points of Calvinism in a Series of Letters* by Horatius Bonar, Andrew Fuller, John Calvin, John Gill, Thomas Goodwin, Jonathan Edwards, pp. 10-12 (N.F.C.E.).
- 4 *Application of Redemption*, Bks. 1-8, p. 328, quoted in Iain Murray, "Thomas Hooker and the Doctrine of Conversion: 'God's Most Mysterious Work,'" *The Banner of Truth*, February 1980, p. 14.
- 5 Marcus Dods, "The Gospel of John," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970.
- 6 As quoted in Dr. Timothy George, "Blessed Hope or Second Coming Scam?" *Florida Baptist Witness*, November 12, 1992.

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