

Salvation "Election"

1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Ephesians 1:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13

Introduction

- [Slide #1] Let me take a few minutes to paint a picture of where we're headed post-Titus. And it has to do with grace. Personally, I've been so enriched by God's grace and mercy these past couple of weeks. It has been sweet water to my soul. That got me thinking and praying as to how we might apply some of the lessons of Titus, namely the importance of sound doctrine, and how we might still focus on grace.
- And as I was thinking and praying the past couple of weeks it just kind of hit me. Talk about salvation. What doctrine is there that's more central to the Christian faith, more important than the doctrine of salvation? Talk about what it means to be saved. And from first to last, from beginning to end, salvation in Christ is grace based. It's like the right color paint. Without the right base tone—the final product is always a tad off. How you view and see your salvation in Christ has all kinds of bearing on how you live that salvation out. If grace isn't the base how you end up living out your salvation will always be a bit off color—not quite right. So why not spend some weeks unpacking what salvation in Christ is really all about? That's the motivation.
- Remember, how we defined doctrine from a couple weeks ago? Doctrine is what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic.¹ So, if you were to break down the doctrine of salvation it would look like this. [Slide #2] Election, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, preservation, glorification. All these terms, which you may or may not be familiar with yet, that's okay. All these terms describe God's saving activity—what God does to save you in Christ. We're going to take a week for each of these and we'll begin today where salvation begins—with election.
- Again, the goal is not only an intellectual understanding of salvation. Head knowledge alone—big brains on sticks with shrunken, shriveled hearts. The goal is, **Titus 1:2**, *truth that leads to godliness*. The goal is truth that better equips us to be faithful disciples.
- So what is election? Election is God's sovereign choice to save sinners. Election is God's beginning act in the saving process. This is what election says. [Slide #3]

¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 25.

Big Idea

- **“God chose us simply because he decided to bestow his love upon us.”²**
- “Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure.”³
- Some of you are probably thinking, now wait a minute, I chose him. I chose God. I've got the date and time to prove it. At 7:22 pm on May 15th, I made the decision to choose Jesus. And the bible would say yes to that. That decision was real and necessary. That decision was a legitimate choice that mattered. “The teaching of Scripture...is that continued resistance to God's grace produces a fixed habit of opposition to God that is not easily broken.”⁴ All of us must either choose or reject Christ; it's a decision with an eternal consequence.
- What the Bible teaches about election is that we choose because God first chose us—and somehow our choice is still real and free. That's not a contradiction—it's a mystery. Election says that salvation begins with God's initiative, not ours. He is the author of our salvation. He makes the first move. **Luke 10: 22** Jesus said, “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” In **John 15:16** Jesus said to his disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” God is the one who draws us. He chooses first.
- And this is where grace comes in. “Nothing makes clearer the ultimacy of grace than the doctrine of election.”⁵ Think of salvation like a wave. Election is the trailing trough, the beginning of God's awesome tsunami of grace. The crest is Christ. It's important to see grace behind election because the bible teaches that we don't naturally seek God on our own. “If God had waited for me to seek after Him, He would still be waiting. **Romans 3:11**, no one seeks God. No-one! Not even you. By nature we run from God. If we seek Him it is only because He has taken the initiative to seek us. I came to Christ because His grace first came to me.”⁶
- I like how **C.S. Lewis** put it when he said, “[people] will talk cheerfully about man's search for God. For me, they might as well talk about the

² Grudem, p. 679.

³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 670.

⁴ Demarest, p. 137.

⁵ Don Carson, *For the Love of God*, 1 Samuel 11; Romans 9; Jeremiah 48; Psalm 25.

⁶ Unlocking the Bible: Election (Genesis 12:1-9) from The Gospel Coalition Blog by Colin Smith

mouse's search for a cat...God closed in on me."⁷ If you are in Christ, by his sovereignty, he has chosen you first.

- Just think about the significance of this for a second. If you're in Christ God chose you. Some of you twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years into this thing called life have never been chosen for anything. Last on the kickball team. Passed over for promotion after promotion. Whatever. But not if you're a Christian. Long ago, in ages past, before the rise of civilization. Before hills, and mountains, and clouds, and rivers, before the foundations of the world. Before the sun and moon and stars. Before all of this, and of his own free will, God made a decision to bring you to Christ and set his love on you so that you might serve and praise him.

Transition

Open your bible to **Ephesians 1**.

- Listen again to what the Apostle Paul says in **Ephesians 1:4-6**. *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.* **Ephesians 1** makes the case that before time began God chose to adopt men and women into a personal and intimate relationship with himself.⁸ Before the creation of the world, God decreed that he would adopt some to be his children.
- Okay, so maybe you're like where? Where else does the bible say this? [Slide #4] Actually, it's all over the pages of Scripture. Few dispute that the bible teaches election. The verses on the screen are just a small sample of the verses that talk of God's sovereign choice to save sinners. There is an in-house disagreement though. The difference comes down to this question. "Does God elect or choose people because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or does God elect people in order that they shall believe in Christ."⁹
- I can't stand before you and say it's both. It's one or the other. So with much humility, let me share with you, before the Lord, as I read scripture, why I think it's the latter. God elects people in order that they shall believe in Christ not because they believe in Christ. As **Augustine** put it, "we are not elected because we have believed but are elected in order that we might believe."¹⁰ I realize you may

⁷ Beeke, p. 71.

⁸ O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 103.

⁹ Joel, Beeke, *Living for the Glory of God*, p. 61.

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 348.

disagree with me. That's okay. Hear me out. And as long as you can show from Scripture why you believe what you believe I have no problem with that.

- See, I think we owe our salvation in Christ entirely to the undeserved favor of God. Scripture never speaks of our faith as the reason God chose us. I owe everything to him. Even my faith to believe comes from him. **2 Timothy 1:9** says "[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time." And I take that *not because of anything we have done* to include my faith.
- Turn in your bibles to **Ephesian 2:8-9**. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.* Question. What's the "this" referring to in **verse 8**? Is the "this" referring to grace? To salvation? To faith? To all three? What is the "this" referring to? I think what Paul has in mind is the "whole concept of a grace-by-faith salvation."¹¹ All of it. All of our salvation. The grace, the faith, everything. All of it is God's gift. "Even the faith and good works of believers are the fruit of the grace of God."¹²
- You might be thinking "how can faith be God's gift? I thought faith was the one thing I brought to the table. God supplies the grace and the salvation and I respond with faith. That's how I keep up my end of the bargain."
- As I read Scripture, that's not what the Bible seems to teach. The way salvation works is this. And this is a sneak peak at the next couple of weeks. God chooses us because he wants to and because it brings him pleasure. He just chooses. Not with partiality. Partiality is favoritism that is corrupted by a willingness to pervert justice for the sake of the favored few. That's not what God does. God always acts justly it was his purpose and will to do so.
- And God's choice, necessarily, at some point, brings about new spiritual life in the person he chooses. The Spirit of God reacting to the sovereign choice of the Father intervenes to quicken the dead heart to new spiritual life. *The Spirit giving birth to spirit*, **John 3:6**. That's called regeneration. New birth. Being born again.
- This is what Jesus tries to explain to Nicodemus, right? And Nicodemus is like, how does this happen? And Jesus says it's a mystery. It's like the

¹¹ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 335.

¹² Louis, Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 115.

wind. The wind has a will of its own. *It blows wherever it pleases* to quote Jesus. We don't control it. The wind is free. The wind does what the wind wants to do.

- And then in **John 3:8** Jesus says the work of the Spirit is like the wind. So *it is with everyone born of the Spirit*. In other words, “we don't cause the Spirit to bring about the new birth any more than we make the wind blow. Or to be more specific, the decisive act of will in the new birth is not ours. The Spirit's will is decisive. The main effect of the wind—the Spirit—is that we are made alive spiritually—born again—and now our wills move. They move to receive Christ and believe on Christ. But our wills move because the *wind* is blowing, not the other way around. We don't move first.”¹³
- We're spiritually dead, we can't. But having been brought to life by the Spirit our will is able to positively respond to the gospel call. In other words, it's because of the Spirit's work and in response to the gospel that faith springs to life. Faith comes from God.
- At least that seems to be what **Romans 10:17** teaches. Listen. *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*. Where does faith come from? Faith is a direct outcome of hearing the saving message about Jesus. Faith is passive on our part. Faith is produced, faith springs to life in a person as a result of a quickened heart made alive by the Spirit hearing and responding to the gospel call. And all of this stems from God's choice. “When God chooses, he can overcome the rebellion and resistance of our wills. He can make Christ look so compelling that our resistance is broken and we freely come to him and receive him and believe him.”¹⁴
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14**. *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That's amazing grace. That's the grace that sought me and found me and came to me all because God first chose to bestow his love on me.
- **Spurgeon** said this about this wonderful, wonderful doctrine. “I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I would never have chosen him; and I am sure he chose me before I was born, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me,

¹³ John Piper, *The Free Will of the Wind*, April 26, 2009.

¹⁴ John Piper, *The Free Will of the Wind*, April 26, 2009.

for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love."¹⁵

- What I want to do now is give some practical applications of election.

Organizational Sentence

- **Seven applications of God's sovereign choice to save sinners**

Transition

Application #1. [Slide #5]

1. Election eliminates all human boasting to make us boast only in the Lord

- If the ultimate determining factor in whether we are saved or not is our own decision to accept Christ, then we may be inclined to think that we deserve some credit for the fact that we were saved. I made a good choice. Comparing ourselves to others who continue to reject Christ, we may laud ourselves that we were wise enough in our judgment, that we made a smart decision to believe in Christ.¹⁶
- **1 Corinthians 1:30** says *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*
- Election grounds us with the proper perspective that salvation is from the Lord. It is because of him that I am in Christ. He did it. He is awesome. He is the Great God and Savior. Do you see?

Transition

Application #2. [Slide #6]

2. Election makes God happy

- **Ephesians 1:4-5** *In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. Did you ever think about that? What brings God pleasure? His choosing for people to believe in Christ based on no merit of their own and simply because he willed it brings God pleasure. It made him happy.*
- **Ephesians 1:8-9** says the same thing. *And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.*
- The lesson being this, the things that make God happy should make us happy. Election is a doctrine to be enjoyed.

¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon

¹⁶ Grudem, p. 678.

Transition

Application #3. [Slide #7]

3. Election is not an injustice

- The human spirit is wired, being made in the image of God, to sense injustice. But election is not an injustice. We forget that God has rights as an omnipotent creator. He is the potter, we are the clay. As his creation, and having been indelibly marred by sin, we have forfeited any right, any claim to unfairness or injustice. We are all cracked pots. We need to remember that it is perfectly fair for God to not save anyone.
- **Romans 9:14-15**. *What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."*
- The fact that he chooses to save some is a testament to his grace and mercy.

Transition

Application #4. [Slide #8]

4. Election encourages evangelism

- That God chooses actually encourages evangelism. It is the Father's will that everyone believing in the Son have eternal life, **John 6:40**, and those who believe can only come at the Father's drawing, **John 6:44, 65**. Therefore, if the Father gives a people to the Son, and He assures these people come to the Son, then we can be assured that evangelism and missions will bear fruit.
- **Acts 13:48** says of Paul and Barnabas' ministry in the city of **Pisidian Antioch** *and all who were appointed for eternal life believed*. People coming to Jesus is dependent upon us speaking and sharing, yes. *Faith comes by hearing*. We have to share. That God has chosen, that he has appointed some should make us more proactive and bolder in the work of evangelism because we know some will respond favorably.
- When people respond favorably it is simply a confirmation of God having first chosen them. Listen to what **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5** says. *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction*. Election is a great encouragement to evangelism.

Transition

Application #5. [Slide #9]

5. Election is meant for our comfort

- Election is not meant to frighten you; it's meant for your comfort. Comfort is at the heart of **Romans 8:28-30**, isn't it. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 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. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*
- By the way, that word, foreknew, foreknowledge. It means this, to know intimately, or forelove. It's a word to describe those whom God long ago thought of in a saving relationship to himself.¹⁷
- I don't know if you caught this but election is the reason for the comfort of **Romans 8**. Paul's point is that God has always acted for the good of those whom he called to himself...From eternity to eternity God has acted with the good of his people in mind. And if God has acted for our good in the past in electing us and he will act in the future by glorifying us, then he will most certainly act for our good in our present circumstances.¹⁸ That should be a tremendously comforting thought.
- Think of the Thessalonians. Severely persecuted. Tempted to renounce Christ. "They would have found little consolation in the reminder that it was *they* who had chosen God."¹⁹ What have I gotten myself into, right? Instead, the supreme encouragement Paul offers them is that God had chosen them. **2 Thessalonians 2:13**. *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*

Transition

Application #6. [Slide #10]

6. God's purpose in election is our holiness

- **Ephesians 1:4** *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*
- **2 Timothy 1:9** *[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*

Transition

¹⁷ Grudem, p. 676.

¹⁸ Grudem, p. 673.

¹⁹ Demarest, p. 133.

Application #7. [Slide #11]

7. Election is meant to elicit praise

- Again, **Ephesians 1**. *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace.*
- “Why am I a Christian? Because God decided to set his love on me. But why me? Because he decided to love me.”²⁰ But why? Because of his grace. To the praise of his glorious grace! Election is meant to elicit praise.

Conclusion

- [Slide #12] So how does one know? How do you know if you're one of the elect? If by faith you have grasped hold of Christ, if you're clinging to Christ alone and nothing else, you are elect. Listen to **Spurgeon's** council. "And why should election frighten you? If you have chosen Christ, depend upon it he has chosen you. If your tearful eye is looking to him [now], then [take comfort] his omniscient eye has long looked on you. If your heart loves him [today], his heart loves you better than you can ever love."²¹
- And if you're still uncertain of your standing, I'll say it again. Choose Christ. Receive him now and you'll find that he has always chosen you. Seek him today and you'll find that he has forever and a day been seeking you. Close in on Christ now and you'll find that he has long since bestowed his love on you and closed in on you first.

²⁰ Grudem, p. 686-7.

²¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Revival Year Sermons*, page 49, altering the "thou" pronouns to "you."