

A Brief Look At Election by William L. Brown

A Brief Look At Election

by

William L. Brown

Pastor, Carmichael Baptist Church

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:” II Thessalonians 2:13.

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” II Timothy 1:9.

This subject of election unto salvation is one that is worthy of our attention. It is a subject that needs to be preached, and most assuredly a biblical doctrine that needs to be accepted and believed as the Bible presents it without the infection of man’s prejudice. In a recent article published in the Berea Baptist Banner (February 1998), the statement was made that “in 1792, in Asplund’s register of Baptist churches it is recorded that 92% of all Baptist churches in America believed in election.” Some have recorded that today it might be 8% of all Baptist churches that believe in election. Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptist churches seem to be more of a minority today than ever before. This doctrine is often grossly misrepresented. A.S. Pettie wrote, “From hostile lips a fair and correct statement of the doctrine is never heard”. C. D. Cole wrote that “The treatment election receives from the hands of its enemies is very much like that received by primitive Christians from pagan Roman Emperors. The ancient Christians were often clothed in the skins of slain animals and then subjected to attack by ferocious wild beasts. So the doctrine of election is clothed in an ugly garb and held up to ridicule and sport.”

Carmichael Baptist Church has stood firm in the faith once delivered, without wavering, for 30 years. During that time churches that once stood with us in this faith have walked away and now teach election as an enemy as presented in the above statement by C.D. Cole. While some will seek to avoid this doctrine and others seek to explain it away, we seek understanding from God according to His word. Just mentioning the word “election” sometimes hardens some Christian’s hearts that they will hear nothing else that is said afterwards because of the hatred of what they conceive the doctrine to teach. Other Christians are just the opposite. When the word election is mentioned they immediately think of “Love before time.”

Defining Election!

The word election simply means choice, to select from among. In the case of our text in II Thessalonians 2:13, the Greek word “chosen” is in the second aorist tense, the middle voice, and indicative mood.

The second aorist places the emphasis on the action being a fact that exists, rather than in regard to time – we translate it in the past tense because the English language has no equivalent. The emphasis is that election is eternal. We will see that more clearly in other passages.

The middle voice indicates the subject performing an action for his own benefit. It emphasizes the fact that it is God that is doing the choosing and we are passive. It might be better illustrated by the phrasing used in Ephesians 1:4-8. “According to the good pleasure of His will.”

“According to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.” Understanding the word in this light is why we hold to the position of “unconditional” election. God does not elect man unto salvation because God foresaw who would and who would not believe. That simply makes man the sovereign and God the servant. Conditional election makes God’s election unto salvation contingent upon man rather than finding its inception, purpose, and pleasure in God. The indicative mood is a simple statement of fact whether it has occurred, is occurring, or will occur. Each illustrates the act of election as an absolute and sovereign decree of God, not man.

The doctrine of election is “God’s eternal and unconditional choice of certain individuals unto everlasting life.” “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:” (Ephesians 1:4). It means that God “set His choice upon certain individuals whom He gave to His Son, for whom Christ died, who in time hear the gospel and believe.” (C. D. Cole). Election is; “God, in mercy, selecting from fallen men a people for His name. It is the very fountain of God’s goodwill to undeserving sinners.” God is clearly defined as the chooser, while believers are defined as the chosen. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48). It is not hard to see from the Bible, without any interference from man, that God ordained some (elected some) to eternal life. God chose and some believed. If you study the context you will see there was a means chosen by God to bring about this end as well.

One other fact about the doctrine of election needs to at least be mentioned. Election is NOT salvation, but UNTO salvation. It therefore precedes salvation. The elect are spoken of as having “obtained” something in time. We were not regenerated in eternity, nor are we converted in eternity. Both are contingent upon the fact of God’s purpose in an election that is carried out in time. Men are saved because they are elected unto salvation, not when they are elected. I like what John Gill wrote when he stated, “Election does not find men in Christ, but puts them there; it gives them a being in him, and union to him;”

The Nature of Election!

From the Scriptures it seems clear that the nature of election is first of all eternal. Just the simple phrase from II Thessalonians 2:13 “God hath from the beginning chosen you” and the same phrasing used in Proverbs 8:23 help us understand this. “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.” Some have tried to make the words in II Thessalonians mean the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, or the beginning of their believing but that is an awful stretch and twisting of Scripture.

This also means it is irrevocable and irreversible – JOH 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. The chosen are given, they will come, and the ones that come will never be cast out. Rather than twisting election into meaning something evil and disgusting the Bible declares it to be exciting and enlightening. One other verse which excites me when I read it is Jeremiah 31:3, The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Because this love is eternal it is with love He draws us. Now can you see election as “Love before Time?”

Election is a sovereign decree of God. The choice of God is solely in His purpose. Why would God tell us election is eternal and according to His good pleasure or sovereign choice? Why did He tell us about the choice of Jacob and rejection of Esau? Why did he say this was done before the children had been born and before they had an opportunity to do evil or good? “That the purpose of God according to election might stand.” (Romans 9:11) So that the purpose of election might stand, remain firm, or not be made into another purpose. The word “purpose” there means “the setting forth of a thing, the placing of it in view.” God told us about election so that we might not see it as being based on works or good or evil in the person. Yet this is exactly what some people do in trying to make the doctrine of election more palatable. It is according to HIS purpose, HIS will, and His good pleasure. Every act of God is sovereign and none can dictate to God or stay His hand. DAN 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

The Preaching of Election:

First of all it encourages the preaching of the gospel and witnessing. Some say it hinders the preaching of the gospel. I believe the exact opposite is true. I can preach that those who have been elected to be clothed with the garments of salvation are certain to be saved. I'd rather trust in God than trust in the fickle and fallen will of man to make the right choice. I rather trust in the power and purpose of God to regenerate rather than in the preacher's abilities to convince the depraved and deceitful heart and mind of man of the truth of the gospel. What a blessing to know that we can preach with confidence and boldness. We can endure heartache and hardships

knowing that God will save elect sinners because of His eternal purpose. That is exactly what the Apostle wrote when he said, Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (II Timothy 2:10).

Preaching election also abolishes confidence in human means. More importantly it abolishes confidence in the evangelism of easy-believism. No one can claim to be one of God's elect unless the fruits of repentance, faith, and holiness are operating in their life to some degree. Why would we want to build a false sense of security in people who rightly should have no assurance of salvation? When you read I Peter 1:2 note it well. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." Telling people to remember the prayer they prayed or the intensity or sincerity of that prayer is not the same as "making your calling and election sure." Now how often have you heard that preached? Those who have never been obedient unto the Lord and have never exhibited any holiness of life have no business being made comfortable in their profession of faith. Be sure of God's work of grace, be sure it is a present reality.

Preaching election will also cancel despondency. If you know that God has set His affection upon you from all eternity and that it is an everlasting love without any interruption then hope and consolation can arise from this great doctrine. Whatever condition or circumstance you find yourself in be sure that God has set His everlasting love upon you. It is God "which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." With that in mind look also at Philippians 1:6, where we find that our state of life should be one of confidence never of despondency. "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:"

A belief in, and preaching of, election will cause a church to stand fast in the old paths of apostolic doctrine and practice. It will solidify us to our history and encourage us to continue in our walk in unity with one another, with those who have stood for the faith before us, and in the truth of God's Word. It will solidify our hearts one to another knowing there is no difference between us, we are all the objects of God's free and amazing grace. "Who maketh thee to differ one from another."

Lastly a biblical presentation and belief in election will glorify God not man. It puts man in the dust where he belongs. It raises God to the heights where He belongs as Sovereign rather than a servant or beggar who simply waits upon man. I like the Biblical presentation of a sovereign God that regenerates whom He wills rather than a god who whimpers before a dead sinner's heart begging him to just open the door. I have a God who will save and whose will cannot be thwarted. I believe in a Savior who secured salvation for an elect people rather than a potential savior who might save if he is allowed. I have a God who will be glorified in the salvation of an

undeserving and unworthy chosen people. Election is not a terrifying doctrine if you look at it from a Biblical perspective rather than from man's prejudice.

William Lee Brown, 1998 – all rights reserved©Copyright