

ECO Essentials: Election for Salvation and Service

In life we experience being chosen in three different ways.

One way we experience it might be like picking teams for the kickball game or winning a college scholarship.

In kickball, we might be picked first because we are really good at it or we might get picked last because we stink. Or as it concerns the scholarship, we get it because we were more qualified than the rest of the applicants, or we don't because we weren't. In life our being chosen is often based on our individual merits and abilities, or lack thereof.

Another way we might get chosen is by random chance. Here I think of Ronald Weatherman buying a raffle ticket at the Appalachian State Football banquet in order to win a App State football helmet or day on the sidelines with a team. Ronald, much to the surprise and delight of coach Jerry Moore, won it three years in a row.

Another way we experience being chosen, the far rarer way, is like that of adoption.

When a child is adopted by parents there is nothing the parent can chose the child by as far as it concerns his merits and abilities. It is a baby, so it's impossible to know how smart, talented, kind, witty, good looking, and hard working the child will grow up to be. Only time will tell, so when a mother and father decide to adopt a child they are not doing it based off the child's merits and qualifications because those things are yet to be determined.

This means that in adoption the choosing is grounded in a mysterious, unearned, grace. The mother and father just say this child is mine. We will choose to love this child and save this child, not because we know he is going to turn out to be the perfect child- the brightest, the most fun loving, best looking, and problem free kid on the block- but we choose this child because we choose this child! This is the child we will love! The child has done nothing to earn our choosing. The mother and father just decide the child will be ours because he is going to be ours!

Of these three ways, it is only the latter that reflects how it is we are saved by God.

Election, Predestination, and Salvation

Salvation is not earned.

As we heard last week "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God- not by works, so that no man can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

In our text today Paul says that "in love God predestined us to be *adopted* as his sons (and daughters) through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the pleasure of his will." (Eph. 1:5)

As it concerns our salvation, we are like the helpless baby in the crib who is laying there waiting for someone to come along and pick us up, and save us. We can't show the prospective parents our skills because we don't have any yet- expect for pooping, peeing, and throwing up. Nor can we prove our smarts because our brains aren't fully developed. Nor can we promise the parents

we can do is lie there in the crib and cry until someone comes along and picks us up and says I choose you, you are the child for us.

This is what our salvation in Jesus Christ is like and the word we use to describe it is election or predestination. Just as the parents decide, with great mystery, this is the child I'm going to choose to rescue, so too does God choose to save us in predestining and electing love. It is this doctrine that we Presbyterians are best known for and it is one that we have wisely chosen to have in our essential tenets document.

The first thing that must be said about election and predestination is that the words are Biblical words and concepts and because of that, all Christians have a doctrine of election and predestination. How could we not have one when Paul uses the word twice in our text today (v.5 and v. 11) and when he says in Romans 8:29 that "those whom God *foreknew* he predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." Or when Jesus says in John 15: 16, "You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit." Or when Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, "no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal to him."

Every serious Christian must have a doctrine of election (being chosen by God) and predestination because the Bible speaks so pervasively about it.

The second thing that must be said about election and predestination is that there is a gentleman's disagreement within the wider circles of Christianity, and sometimes even within the Presbyterian family of faith, as to the meaning of this doctrine and how it ought to be understood.

Are we chosen by God in Christ for salvation because God in his foreknowledge is able to look into the future and see that we will choose Christ first; therefore God reciprocates our first move and then on the grounds of our decision to choose Christ, He chooses us? Or does God in his foreknowledge look into the future and simply see that everyone is lost, with no hope of saving themselves, and then in His mercy and grace He elects (chooses) to save some and then pass over others for salvation, thereby leaving them to judgment and damnation?

This is the million dollar question and good Christians on both sides have debated this question of whether or not God's predestination of His people is based off His ability to look into the future and choose people on the grounds that he sees them choosing Christ first, or whether God looks into the future and sees a lost hopeless humanity and says this one is mine, I will save him in my mercy and grace and the other I will pass over in my justice.

The Case for the Classic Reformed View

So which one does the preacher believe? As much as it sometimes disturbs me to say it, I believe it is the latter.

Here is why. First, I believe God is sovereign over salvation. If God's predestination is based off God's ability to look into the future and predestine and choose those whom he sees will choose him first, then God man is sovereign in salvation and God is reacting to man's decision.

The second reason that I believe that God's election and predestination is rooted in God's decision to save some and then passover others, and not on his ability to look into the future and base his election on man's decision to first choose him, is because I truly believe that fallen sinful men have lost the ability to make that choice. Sure man, is free to decide to first choose the Lord, but in his freedom that is not the decision he makes. In his freedom man makes the same choice Adam makes, the choice of self, not salvation. We are free but our wills are in bondage and in our bondage we choose sin, self, and damnation, not salvation.

So in order for us to be saved God must elect us for salvation and then in that decision he comes after us with the hounds of heaven and the Spirit quickens our hearts and enables us and prods us to believe the gospel. God in his mercy and grace, God in his election and predestination, says I will remove the scales from your eyes and I will break up your stony heart so that you may repent and believe the gospel. And unless God does that we shall remain lost, and continue to make the same mistake that our earthly father Adam made.

Some cry this is not fair. You are right. it is not. Fairness would be no one being saved and everyone being damned. What I am describing is not fairness, but mercy and grace for some and justice for others.

None the less, you are free to see it differently, if you do. Good Christians have long disagreed and argued about the mysteries of election and predestination and what it may mean or not mean.

The Point of It All

But here's the point of it all, regardless of how you may understand it, this biblical doctrine is meant to be a source of comfort to you the believer.

Because God is sovereign and salvation is fully in his hands and Christ has done all that is necessary to save you, including quickening your heart so that you are enabled to believe the gospel by faith, your salvation is secure. It will not be lost. If you are in Christ God has elected you for salvation and He will not let you go. What did Jesus say in John's gospel? He said, "All whom the Father has given me I will save. I will lose none of them."

The doctrine is also meant to keep you humble, not arrogant. You should look back on your salvation in Christ and ask, as I heard it asked on Wednesday by the Duckcreek boys, "Why me Lord?" I didn't do this God. Even the faith I have in Jesus is a gift from you. Had you not elected and predestined me for salvation in Christ I would have remained lost in my sin, doing the same the thing Adam did in the garden, which is rejecting you.

Finally, this doctrine is the basis for our good works in the Lord. The text tells us in v. 4 that "we were chosen in Christ before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in God's sight." And in Ephesians 2:10, after Paul says "we are saved by grace through faith," he then tells us we are "For God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance (beforehand) for us to do."

This is why when we Presbyterians talk about our election and predestination in Christ, we like to do so not only because the Lord has elected to save us from damnation but also because the Lord

has elected us for service in God's kingdom. We serve the Lord and we do the works of the Father *not* because these things save us, but because we are grateful for God's electing and predestining grace in our lives and we want to express that gratitude for our salvation in Christ by living a life of service in his Kingdom, both in this world and in the world to come.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.