

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 37 - ELECTION]

Last time we saw how the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of humanity had a dramatic impact on the relationship between God and mankind.

- ◆ No longer would mankind live under the condemnation of the law because justice had been served.
- ◆ If the penalty has been paid, how can God require it be paid a second time?
- ◆ When Jesus died on our behalf, it allowed God to offer forgiveness to all, and as a consequence, our status in God's eyes changed.
- ◆ Rather than living under the condemnation of the "law," mankind now lives under God's free gift of "grace."

But now we have to look at another aspect of this representative principle and that is the subject of "election."

- ◆ Election comes down to the question, who does God elect to save and not save?
- ◆ "Election" or "predestination" as it is also called is a controversial subject that has been argued down through the centuries.
- ◆ It is not my purpose here to discuss in detail the various theories on election but they can be summed up under three basic headings.
- ◆ First, is Double Predestination, where some are elected to life and salvation while others are condemned to death and damnation?
- ◆ God has predetermined this decision and there is nothing anyone can do about it.
- ◆ The second theory is Universalism where the grace of God is all-encompassing and all are destined to be saved.
- ◆ Again, Universalists believe God has predetermined this and one can't reject God's gift of grace even if they want to.
- ◆ The third theory is Pelagianism, which basically says we are saved or condemned by the "good works" we either do or refuse to do.
- ◆ This theory is different to the others in that we are the ones who determine our destiny.
- ◆ God grants us grace and salvation if we obey His commandments and laws and if we disobey those same laws we get the punishment we deserve.
- ◆ In other words, our "works" determine where we go!
- ◆ There is a variation on this theme that is called Semi-Pelagianism.
- ◆ In this version, we again are the ones who determine our destiny, but in this case, we decide either to accept or reject God's free gift of grace through our own freewill.
- ◆ One has only to look at what human free-will has accomplished so far in our story to know what a dubious proposition this is!
- ◆ And a good follow-up question would be, after all God has done so far to grant us the opportunity for salvation, would He now leave this important last step to our fallible free-will?
- ◆ We will cover this subject of "calling" later when we get to the subject of the church.
- ◆ All three of these theories tend to overemphasise either the aspect of the sovereignty of God or the grace of God.

But if we are to understand the subject of election correctly, the place to begin is with the nature of God.

- ◆ It is true that God is sovereign, He is just and He is graceful, but first and foremost, scripture emphatically tells us God is "love."
- ◆ So we have to understand as we did earlier with the subject of God's wrath, that all of his holy qualities including wrath and judgment are initiated from a position of "love."
- ◆ The subject of election begins with a God who is "love."
- ◆ So far in this series we have been looking at the extraordinary lengths to which God has gone in order to achieve reconciliation with his creation.
- ◆ After all this effort, are we to believe this has been done only to benefit a few?
- ◆ And is the Gospel really "glad tidings of great joy for all men," or is it just for a select few (Luke 2:10)?
- ◆ Are we to believe that God our Father only loves some of His children while He hates others?
- ◆ What is the point of bringing children into existence only to condemn some to destruction or to an eternity in hell?
- ◆ How many of us as parents would like to be placed in a position where we are forced to consign one of our children to heaven and the other to hell?

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- ◆ Are we also to conclude that God in deciding who is saved and who is condemned shows partiality?
- ◆ Yet over and over in both the Old and New Testament, showing partiality and favouritism is condemned and the patriarch Job tells us God Himself does not show partiality (Job 34:18-20).
- ◆ Even parents with poor parenting skills know it is not love to favour one child over another, yet it seems some are willing to attribute partiality to God, the perfect parent, as He chooses which child to save and which one to condemn?
- ◆ What does it say of God's love, in the case of Pelagianism, where His love is conditional on our response? "I will only love you, if you first love me."
- ◆ Then what do we do with scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:4.
- ◆ **1 Timothy 2:4 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people.**
- ◆ It is very clear in this scripture and others what is our sovereign God's plan for mankind, He desires "**all people to be saved.**"
- ◆ This section of scripture also gives us a very clear answer as to who is both elected and predestined.
- ◆ It is none other than the mediator between God and mankind, Jesus Christ. As it says, "**He gave himself as a ransom for all people**" (1 Timothy 2:6).
- ◆ "He," Jesus Christ is the second Adam, representative of all mankind (1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 5:18).
- ◆ He is the lamb chosen (or elected) by the Father to be slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8).
- ◆ **Luke 9:35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."**
- ◆ And perhaps the most heartening section of scripture on this subject of predestination is Ephesians 1:3-11.
- ◆ This section of scripture is Paul's testimony to three things.
- ◆ 1) The extent of the Father's love and grace for mankind.
- ◆ 2) How this love and grace is displayed through the saving work of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ 3) How mankind is inextricably bound to the predestined One, Jesus Christ (see underlined passages below).
- ◆ Notice these three aspects as we read it.
- ◆ **Ephesians 1:3-11 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 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 for adoption to sonship 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. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. 11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will**
- ◆ By his election, Christ has bound himself to all men. This is good news for both Christians and non-Christians because our salvation does not depend on an unpredictable capricious god, or our works, or our fickle freewill, but rather on the love and grace of the Father and the saving works of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ This is the nature of our "electing" God, and the nature of the "elected One," Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Through their love and through their grace, mankind has been "elected" as Paul says to become sons "**in the heavenly realm with every spiritual blessing in Christ.**"
- ◆ These and questions like them should cause us to pause before consigning some of our fellow sinful humans to heaven and some to hell as frankly it does not accurately reflect God's true purpose and God's true nature of love.
- ◆ Sometimes there can be a smug arrogance in Christian circles to paint ourselves as being superior to non-Christians which can cloud our judgment on the subject of predestination.
- ◆ We need to remember we too were once counted amongst the wicked.
- ◆ None of us deserves to be chosen, and none of us can earn that right. It is purely a gift of grace from our gracious God who loves all His children.

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- ◆ We need to remind ourselves it is God's will for "**all people to be saved**" and work towards that end.
But for Christ, His election as our representative is a double-edged sword.
 - ◆ This choice starts Him down a road that inevitably leads to the cross as it puts Him directly under the judgment of God.
 - ◆ By choosing to become incarnate with us and join us in our humanity, Jesus puts Himself squarely into the enmity between a holy God and a sinful mankind.
 - ◆ On the one hand He is the God who judges mankind, and on the other He is the representative of sinful man judged by God.
 - ◆ In the person of Christ, a Holy God and a sinful mankind come face to face and the result is God's ultimate and final solution to sin.
 - ◆ It is on the cross that God unleashes His fearful judgment on sinful mankind.
 - ◆ But instead of condemning mankind to damnation, Jesus as the "elected" One elects to substitute Himself in the place of sinful mankind and bears the full brunt of God's wrath against sin.
 - ◆ God's wrath is unleashed on His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.
 - ◆ There is much talk and speculation about the final judgment at Christ's return, but in reality, this is the true final judgment.
 - ◆ But it is at this precise moment of final judgment that a condemned mankind experiences the amazing love and grace of their heavenly Father.
 - ◆ The Judge, Jesus Christ, walks around the judgment bench and substitutes Himself in our place to bear the full brunt of God's holy wrath against sin.
 - ◆ **Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
 - ◆ As the price has been paid by the substitute, Jesus Christ, there is no need for any human being to ever experience the final judgment.
 - ◆ Instead of death, now Jesus offers us the gift of eternal life. It beckons to be accepted and Jesus stands at the door and knocks (Revelation 3:20).
 - ◆ Through His substitutionary life and death on our behalf and His willingness to forgive our sins, Jesus removes the enmity between God and man, so we can now live in the liberty of God's grace.
 - ◆ The "elected" One as the one slain from the foundation of the world knew this was His lot if He joined Himself to humanity.
 - ◆ But it was a burden He was willing to bear such was His love for his children.
 - ◆ In fact it was a burden He accepted with joy in His heart.
 - ◆ **Hebrews 12:2 For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**
 - ◆ But it was through this process of joining Himself to humanity that the predestined One, Jesus Christ, has allowed all humanity to also be predestined to share in His sonship.
 - ◆ This is what Paul is saying in **Ephesians 1:5 ...In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.**
 - ◆ God has elected Jesus to be our substitute to bear the sins of the world on the cross and therefore by extension as our representative, has made it possible for all mankind to have the opportunity to become sons of God.
- So to go back to the question we asked at the beginning, "Who does God elect to save and not save?"**
- ◆ The question itself is misleading as it misrepresents God's clear intention.
 - ◆ Scripture and the actions of God displayed through the incarnational and atoning works of Jesus Christ makes it very clear that God's intention is for all to be saved if possible (1 Timothy 2:4).
 - ◆ But a problem still remains. Now that the way has been opened for mankind to be forgiven and accepted by God, how is this knowledge communicated to an unsuspecting world?
 - ◆ And how will a hostile world respond to this remarkable display of God's love and grace on their behalf?
 - ◆ That is for a future session as now we have to deal with Jesus' death on the cross and what it means for the world.