

“Sovereign Election”
1 Thessalonians 1:4
(Preached at Trinity, March 3, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul was in the midst of his second missionary journey. He had traveled to Philippi where he faced much opposition. In the midst of the opposition God saved Lydia and the Philippian jailer and others. Leaving Philippi, he traveled to Thessalonica where he again faced great hostility and again left the city—but not before seeing many come to faith in Christ. Leaving Thessalonica, he proceeded on to Athens and then to Corinth.
2. Paul was distressed to know how these new converts were doing. In the face of so much hostility, were they enduring? Was their profession of faith in Christ genuine? He sent Timothy to minister to them and to bring back a report on how they were faring.
1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,"
1 Thessalonians 3:6-7 NAU - "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, ⁷ for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;"
3. Paul was greatly encouraged and comforted at the report of their faith. His heart was filled with great gratitude as he heard of their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope."
4. Paul knew that this wasn't merely human endurance. It was the outward demonstration of God's supernatural power working in them.
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "or our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit"
5. God had chosen them unto salvation and was working mightily in them. This work began in eternity - "knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you"
Paul uses the noun, ἐκλογή. It means to choose, select, or elect. It speaks of the doctrine of Divine election. It is a doctrine that is much despised. This is amazing, since the Bible addresses the subject so clearly.
2 Peter 1:10 NAU - "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble" KJV – "calling and election . . ."
6. The verbal form is also used - ἐκλέγω
Ephesians 1:3-4 NAU - "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

7. And the adjectival form - ἐκλεκτός
Colossians 3:12 NAU - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;"
2 Thessalonians 2:13 NAU - "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."
2 Timothy 2:10 NAU - "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory." ESV – "for the sake of the elect"
8. With all of this evidence, most still reject the doctrine of election.
 There are two objections people usually offer.
- A. Some insist infringes upon our free will.
 Man doesn't give up his autonomy easily. He wants to rule his own life. He wants to be in control. Election puts God in control with sovereign dominion over all things, including the salvation of man. God gets all the glory.
 Tom Nettles writes in his book, *By His grace and for His Glory*, "The doctrine of unconditional election, perhaps more than any other biblical doctrine, inspires a marvelous awe before the almighty God and humbles His creatures. While shattering all glory that man may seek for himself, the doctrine rivets in our minds the truth that God indeed is the blessed and only potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who will bring to pass in His own time not only the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ but all things. To Him be honor and might forever!"¹
- B. The other objection is that election is unfair. It is unfair that God would choose some to salvation while leaving the rest to go to hell.
 What they are really saying when they say that God is unfair is that He is being unjust—that injustice is being done—that God is guilty of injustice if He doesn't deal equally with all men.
 God never acts unjustly. He righteously gives some mercy while he gives the rest justice. God can never be accused of being unrighteous.
 The plain simple truth is that no man deserves the marvelous grace of God. Justice demands that all face God's condemnation.
 Loraine Boettner writes: "The marvel of marvels is not that God, in his infinite love and justice, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. When we consider, on the one hand, what a heinous thing sin is, together with its dessert of punishment, and on the other, what holiness is, together with God's perfect hatred of for sin, the marvel is that God would get the consent of His holy nature to save a single sinner."² (an unattributed quote by B.B. Warfield)

¹ Nettles, Thomas J., *By His Grace and for His Glory*, (Cape Coral: Founders Press, 2006), 305.

² Boettner, Loraine, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1932), 96.

- I. There are a couple of misconceptions regarding the doctrine election
- A. First misconception: election involves the choosing of a nation, not of individuals
1. In the Old Covenant God chose Israel from among all the other nations of the world. Israel was set apart as distinct, holy.
Exodus 19:5-6 NAU - "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."
 - a. This was not God's ultimate purpose for choosing the nation Israel. There was nothing salvific in Israel's election. God's purpose in raising up Israel was to reveal a series of covenants which would find their fulfillment in Christ.
 - b. The election of Israel served as a type or example of God's election of individuals unto salvation. Why did God choose Israel as a nation?
Deuteronomy 7:7-8 – "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all But because the LORD loved you"
 In other words, God chose them because He chose to choose them—and then we read:
Deuteronomy 7:8 NAU - "but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers"
 - c. God is keeping covenant. The nation of Israel was important because they contained God's chosen seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 2. Even in the Old Covenant God's election was of individuals.
 - a. God chose Abraham
 - b. He chose Isaac over Ishmael.
 - c. Isaac had two twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the first-born. Being the first-born carried particular blessings. But God ordained that Jacob would receive the blessings of the first-born son. It would be through Jacob that the covenant promise would continue. Jacob's name would be changed to Israel and he became the father of the nation. Israel's purpose was to point to Christ.
 - d. God's election was according to His sovereign purpose.
Romans 9:10-15 NAU - "for though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to *His* choice (ἐκλογῆ) might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 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."

3. Paul makes it clear here that God has chosen individuals unto salvation and it was by His sovereign will.
 - a. In the midst of the nation of Israel God had a remnant according to grace, a remnant ordained to eternal life.
Romans 11:5 KJV - "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."
 - b. Why did God choose you as an individual? He chose you only because it pleased Him to do so.
Ephesians 1:5 NAU - "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,"
KJV - "according to the good pleasure of his will,"
 - c. This is the design of election—that God chose to save a multitude from among the host of lost humanity simply because it pleased Him to do so.
- B. The second misconception was that God’s election is based upon His foreknowledge of faith. He chose those who would believe.
 1. The Bible describes God’s election as unconditional – in no way was election dependent upon any foreseen faith or good works. The Bible teaches that no one has turned to God without God’s intervention.
Romans 3:10-12 KJV - "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: ¹¹ There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. ¹² They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."
 2. The Bible teaches that we believe *because* we were ordained to eternal life not that we were ordained to eternal because we believed
Acts 13:48 NAU - "When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."
2 Timothy 1:9-10 NAU - "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,"
 3. The nature of man renders him totally incapable of loving God or keeping His commands. – “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” The lost man has no way of pleasing God. There is nothing he can do to earn God’s favor. The only thing he has earned is God’s wrath and condemnation.
 4. If election was based upon our least effort, then ultimately our salvation is based upon our works, which Scripture denies.
Ephesians 2:8-9 NAU - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

- II. Election is God's eternal purpose in the Covenant of Redemption
- A. The Father chose a multitude from among the fallen race of humanity
1. The Father gave them to His Son who would come as their Redeemer
John 6:38-39 NAU - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
 2. The Holy Spirit would effectually apply the work of Christ to the elect.
 - a. God's election is irresistible
 - b. Those whom God has chosen *shall* be saved.
 - c. God by His Spirit transforms the heart of a man which enables Him to believe and which makes him willing. In essence, He changes our nature giving us a transformed will to follow Him. All elected by God will come to Him.
John 6:37 NAU - "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."
 3. This transforming work gives the power to persevere in faith, hope, and love.
1 Thessalonians 1:3-4 NAU - "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you"
- B. Election is founded upon the work of Christ.
1. In the Covenant of Redemption God purposed to redeem a particular people. He chose a particular people to give to His Son.
 2. Jesus pledged to redeem them through His own death.
The finished work of Christ makes the salvation of the elect certain
 3. According to Divine purpose, Jesus was sent to actually accomplish the redemption of a particular people
Ephesians 1:4 NAU - "just as He chose us in Him"
Matthew 1:21 NAU - "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
John 6:39 NAU - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."
 4. There is not the slightest hint of uncertainty in God's work of redemption
Romans 8:29-30 NAU - "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified."

III. The Comfort in knowing our election

- A. It is glorious to know that God has set His love upon you
"knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you"
1. It was encouraging to Paul to observe the fruit of their election. It was encouraging to them for Paul to remind them of this wonderful grace.
 2. We cannot explain election
 - a. We cannot know why God chose one person over another – why Jacob over Esau, why God chose Peter over Judas
 - b. We cannot know why we were born where the gospel is preached while millions perish having never heard
 3. The only thing we know is that He loved us because He loved us and because He loved us He chose us unto salvation and because He chose us He sent forth Christ to save us from our sin.
- B. Because God chose us and sent forth His Son to redeem us He will never allow us to fall away
John 10:27-29 NAU - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ "My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand."
1. We are in the hands of our omnipotent God
 2. Not a single one of the elect shall be lost
Romans 8:38-39 NAU - "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - a. Upon what is that wonderful passage based?
 - b. It is based upon God's wonderful love shed upon us before the world began
Romans 8:35-37 NAU - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us."
- C. We have the comfort of knowing that God is working His purpose for our good
Romans 8:28 – "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."
 1. It is of infinite comfort to know that God has a purpose and that we are a part of that purpose. It is of infinite comfort to know that God has chosen us adopted us as His dear children.
 2. We don't understand all of the workings of God's Providence but we can know that He has chosen us and loves us and that He is working for our good. And we can trust that the God of glory is just in working out His Divine will and purpose.

Conclusion:

1. God's election unto salvation is the greatest gift that one could receive. That God has chosen to love you and send His Son to die for you is our great joy.
2. How are you to know if you are one of God's elect? Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy knew that these Thessalonians were chosen of God?
 "knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you;"
 - A. How did they know that God's eternal love was fixed upon them?
 Paul was basing his conclusion upon the evidence.
1 Thessalonians 1:3 NAU - "bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope"
 1. This passage affirms that although we do not possess perfect discernment, we are able to observe the evidence of salvation. We can know our fellow believers.
 2. And it affirms we can know our own election
2 Peter 1:10 ESV - "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall."
 - B. But the greatest evidence of election is that we have believed the Gospel of Christ
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"
3. The plain truth of the Gospel: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."