

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

04-72

Dear Reader

The Doctrine of Election from Scripture

We trust the last issue which began our study on election and free-will forced you to study the scriptures referenced and that you are now prepared to do some more study. For those of you who already are comfortable with this doctrine, please make yourselves available to help those who perhaps have never heard these things. I remember at the Eastern Bible Conference over 20 years ago, a young man (who had just read my previously-referenced pamphlet on election) rather forcefully asking an older brother if he believed what I wrote. The older brother said, "Yes." Then the next, almost angry statement was, "Then why haven't you ever taught it to me?" Please don't be one who has never taught it to the younger generation, regardless of its controversial nature. Let's then begin the second part of our study.

Romans 8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:3-5

"... to those who are called according to His purpose, for whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom.8:28-30). "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, just as He [the Father] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph.1:3-5).

Some have received a divine call others do not receive, and it is by divine purpose, by God's will. This call is far more than the general call of the gospel "Whoever wills may come" (which we looked at in the previous issue) which is broadcast far and wide, to the whole world, by radio, TV, the Internet, literature and the preaching of millions of redeemed people of every language and nation. The difference between these two "calls" is seen in Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few chosen." We believers know we are part of that vast company of the elect as a result of God's

foreknowledge of all persons and events. He then chose or elected us in Christ before there ever was an earth. So our birth was not by random chance, as impossible as that seems. Some argue that God knew who would believe and then "chose" those: Nonsense! That makes God subservient to us and assumes some little spark of good in us and a free will, which we have seen we don't have. It also makes election a farce and God far from being sovereign. But God *is* sovereign!

Those who God chose or elected (either term is fine) were *predestinated*. What does that mean? The word means "marked out beforehand." Long before we were born we were marked out to be ones who would be conformed to the image [representation] of the Lord Jesus. We are to be morally like Him, to represent Him. We also have been marked out to be adopted [divinely placed] as sons of God, given the place (according to Jewish custom) of highest privilege. In that sense every Christian sister is a "son" as is also every Christian brother in the Lord.

It wouldn't do much good for us to be marked out for very special privilege if we remained in our sins. So we were *irresistibly* called. Some think God's call can be resisted. No way, "for it is *God* who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil.2:13)! God's call brings about whatever change is necessary for the call to be heard and heeded. Remember, our very faith to believe comes from God (Eph.2:8-9). Our verse in Romans 8 tells us that all those He calls, He justifies. *Justification* is a work of God where the sinner is "declared righteous" – a judicial term meaning that God no longer views us as "only a *sinner* saved by grace," but as a *saint*, a sanctified-one, one set apart to and for God. It is very important for our spiritual peace and growth for us to see, accept and appreciate our new position in Christ! We're seen as "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph.1:6), in Christ, not in our sins. Then we're *already* seen as "glorified" even though it won't actually happen till the future, because God sees it as a done deal.

We have God's Word as the authority to state that none of the elect will ever be caught by death or the Lord's coming before they have accepted Christ. Philippians 1:6 plainly says that "being confident of this very

thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” God is in charge!

Being all according to “the good pleasure of His will” again shows that all is of God and nothing of my own merit.

1 Peter 1:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in sanctification [setting apart] of the Spirit” (1 Pet.1:2). “Because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification [setting apart] by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thes.2:13).

Once again, it is clear we are the elect, the chosen of God. The Holy Spirit sets us apart for God and there is no salvation apart from belief in the truth. Even though the Holy Spirit does the needed divine work that gives us the faith to believe, man’s responsibility and need to believe the truth and accept Christ is never set aside.

The Love Gift of the Father to Christ

John 10 and 17 show that the elect are the Father’s love gift to His Son. Speaking of His sheep, the Lord said in John 10:29, “My Father, *who has given them to Me*, is greater than all.” In the Lord’s prayer to His Father in John 17, we have in verses 2,6,9,11,12,24 the same expression. For example, verse 24 says, “Father, I desire that *they also whom You gave Me* may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” We are not a product of blind chance or the spin of the wheel, the “luck” of being at the right place at the right time to hear the gospel cleverly presented, *but are deliberately chosen out of all mankind and specifically given by God the Father to Christ, to be His bride, His Church, to be with Him forever.*

Then the Lord said in John 6:37, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” Again we see the irresistible call: none of the elect, given by the Father, will fail to come to Christ, but there still must be the coming by each one of us. Yes, God must work first in mysterious ways, but then man must come. That’s what we proclaim in the gospel: “Come to Christ for salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe that He died for your sins, that He paid the terrible cost, that He arose victorious and now commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Peter and

Paul preached it (Acts 3:19; 16:31; 20:21). So we must never think the gospel is not important. God says it is very important! Even if no one is saved, every time it is preached it brings glory to God.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him: and I will raise him up at the last days Therefore, everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (Jn.6:44-45). Again we see the impossibility of salvation apart from the Father’s intentional and specific drawing. All so drawn hear the divine call from the Father. What causes them to hear is not told us here, but it is clearly a divine work that is necessary: it is not a “bettering” of the natural man who will not and cannot come, as we have seen.

The involvement of the entire trinity is clear. The Lord said in John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” Yes, the Lord is talking specifically to His disciples, but the truth is universal. This verse also shows that appointment for specific service is distinct from, and follows the Lord’s choosing for salvation.

Paul’s Conversion

I’m sure we all know the story of Paul’s conversion on the Damascus Road as related three times in Acts. Paul was struck down by a light brighter than the sun (Acts 26:13), heard from Jesus, and said, “What will You have me to do, Lord?” But we are less familiar with Paul’s testimony in Galatians 1. After explaining his zealotry for Judaism that led him to persecute the Church “beyond measure and try to destroy it,” and of his rapid advancement in Judaism, he went on to say, “But when it pleased God who separated me from my mother’s womb and *called me* through His grace, *to reveal His Son in me*, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I ...” (vv.15-16).

At a specific time in his life, entirely of God’s choosing, there was a dramatic revealing of Christ *in* Paul. Note it doesn’t say “*to me*” but “*in me.*” Yes, outwardly, there was a divine light and a vision and voice of Christ. All with him saw the light *and were afraid* (Acts 22:9), but it seems to have had no other effect on them. But there was more. There was the inward work of God *in* Paul. I can’t explain it, but there it is! It was the outcome of Paul’s calling and was immediately effective, completely changing this insolent, overbearing young man (1 Tim.1:13 JND). For most of us, God’s call evidently is so gentle we don’t realize what has happened, yet the gospel is now

urgent and we gladly accept Christ as Lord and Savior. All praise is His! Our very faith to believe comes from Him. There is nothing for you and me to boast about! There is lots to worship, praise and thank our Lord for!

Unrighteousness with God?

The foes of the doctrine of election constantly bring in the fact (as they see it) that if election is as we claim herein, then God is unrighteousness, for if some are chosen for salvation, then others must be (they think) chosen for perdition, for damnation, for hell. Using Israel's history as an example, we are given a stern warning in Romans 9 not to question a righteous and holy God. "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion. So then it is not of him who wills [he *won't* will on God's side], nor of him who runs [no one will run towards God], but of God who shows mercy" (vv.14-16). If there's any blessing for any of us, it must come from God.

You may say, "You skipped the account of Jacob and Esau." Well, God had a purpose according to election (v.11) regarding these two brothers. Did God doom Esau? No, but God's purpose was that the elder shall serve the younger (v.12). But, you say, verse 13 says, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." But notice it says "as it is written" (v.13). *When* was it written? At the time of Malachi (Mal.1:2-3), over 1000 years after these two men had died. Jacob was generally faithful to God, although with many failures. Esau was anything but faithful. There is no thought of God hating Esau during his life, although He surely hated his deeds.

After giving the account of evil Pharaoh whom God raised up to show His power to the world, verse 18 continues, "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will? But indeed, O man, *who are you to reply against God?* Will the thing formed say to Him who formed it, Why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and make His power known, endured with much longsuffering *the vessels for wrath prepared for destruction*, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on *the vessels of mercy which He had prepared beforehand for glory*, even us whom He

called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" (vv.18-24).

How dare we, with our feeble minds who at the best see God's plan in such a limited degree and imperfect way, question the absolutely righteous God? The fact is, none of us deserved mercy. It would have been absolutely righteous for God to send us all to hell. None of us would have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior apart from God showing us mercy, electing us and doing what was necessary to bring us to the Lord Jesus.

But, you say, it says that God prepared some for destruction; that they are vessels of wrath. No, you're wrong. Read more carefully! Notice the two italicized phrases in the above verses. First, we've already seen that while unsaved, we "Were children of wrath, just as the others" (Eph.2:3). John 3:36 implies the same thing: God's wrath abides on all unbelievers. But the above phrase doesn't say *who* prepared them for destruction. But notice the second statement. We, the elect, the ones God showed mercy to, were prepared for glory *by Him!* This implies that the sinner, by refusing God's provision, prepares *himself* for destruction. They can't blame God. But for some, chosen out of sovereign love, as undeserving as anyone else, God showed mercy to them. They – we who are saved included – were prepared by God from before the foundations of the world. Then sometime after our birth, we were called with that irresistible call.

How About Children?

The Bible deals with children as a special case. Up to some age which perhaps varies with the child, they are not capable of making a choice, even if they truly had free will. The Lord says in Matthew 18:10 in connection with little children, "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven." Although this verse is difficult to interpret, many believe He applies salvation to little children until they reach the point of being able to choose. We see the use of the word *angel* as representing the spirit of a person in Acts 12:15 and this appears to be the usage of the word in Matthew 18.

The next clause (Matthew 18:11) tells us that "the Son of Man has come to *save* that which was lost" – not to "*seek* and to save" as in Luke 19:10 when dealing with the general population. Little children are lost and need a Savior, but *seeking* implies a condition of active, conscious wandering from God which is not yet true

with little children. I have no doubt this is the correct interpretation.

Think how comforting this is to Christian parents who have lost children, perhaps even before birth. Think of the mercy of God on millions upon millions of babies who die in countries where the gospel is hindered, and upon the untold millions of aborted babies, murdered by mothers who don't want the responsibility of a child. These, along with us, will "forever be with the Lord."

Many of the elect are saved at very early ages. I was 6 or 7 years old when saved, so I'm told. It is a mercy of God to be saved early without going through many of the sinful experiences of the unsaved, although those saved later in life, like the apostle Paul, may be more acutely aware of what they've been saved from, and thus may be more thankful. God never makes a mistake in His timing.

Closing Thoughts

So, to be pleasing to our Lord, we go out in our daily lives, walking the pathway outlined for us in the Word of God, believing and obeying (practicing) the truth (doctrines) He has given us. We follow our Lord's teachings (doctrine) as to His Church, His chief interest today. And each in our own capacity, some far more gifted in evangelism than others, we tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ and that He died for their sins and their need for Him as their Savior. We realize that "it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor.1:21). We thus preach Christ and His work on the cross. Yes, to most who hear us, it's foolishness, but we preach Him anyway. We use tracts and other "means." We pray for our unsaved relatives, friends and neighbors. Except with little children who die early in life, all who are saved are saved by believing that "foolish" message. Yet we realize that only those ordained to eternal life accept what we preach.

Bob Costen writes, "The doctrine of election should encourage us to preach the gospel to whoever we come in contact, as we do not know who God has chosen. Therefore, let us invite men, women, boys and girls to come to Christ and accept the salvation He offers, as God is not willing that any should perish, but come to repentance (2 Pet.3:9). Not only so, but God desires that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim.2:4)."

Sir Robert Anderson said something along the lines of, "When we approach the gate of salvation, we see 'Whoever wills may come.'" But when we get inside and look back, we see inscribed on the inside of the gate, "Chosen in Him before the foundations of the world." That's the story of the gospel and election in a few words. The gospel is thus one part – although an important part – of our total Christian life. It never stands in the way of obedience to all that God has given in His Word, including our assembly walk.

RPD

Just a little reminder of our Internet website, www.assemblymessenger.com. My thanks to my daughter Cindy for maintaining it. Also of our preferred mailing address, Dearborn Heights Christian Assembly, 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights MI 48127-1780. Please let us know of address changes. Returned mail is very expensive. Also, my continuing thanks to Mike Doyle for supplying address labels and for Art and Dorothy Kocharoff, along with my wife, for stuffing envelopes. All work done in relation to the *Assembly Messenger* is done by volunteers as a service for the Lord.

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