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# Article V. God's Purpose of Grace

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Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

*Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; 1 Samuel 8:4-7,19-22; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Matthew 16:18-19; 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; Luke 1:68-79; 2:29-32; 19:41-44; 24:44-48; John 1:12-14; 3:16; 5:24; 6:44-45,65; 10:27-29; 15:16; 17:6,12,17-18; Acts 20:32; Romans 5:9-10; 8:28-39; 10:12-15; 11:5-7,26-36; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:4-23; 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10,19; Hebrews 11:39-12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:2-5,13; 2:4-10; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:19; 3:2.*

(Sermon Title)

Passage???

There are two important doctrines in the Baptist Faith and Message Statement entitled, "God's Purpose of Grace." One is election, and the other is the Perseverance of the Saints, or Eternal Security. Both are important; both are supreme proofs of the incredible grace of God. But time will allow me to focus only on one—and I know which one you would rather hear about! In this time of mounting interest in doctrinal issues like Calvinism, I know you want to hear about election, and I want to talk to you about election.

But before I do that, I want to say a word about the Security of the Believer. It is a wonderful doctrine that reminds the church of the faithfulness of God. But like many wonderful doctrines, we don't seem to talk about it as often as we should. I want to

encourage you as the ministers of the next generation: learn this doctrine, study this doctrine, and preach this doctrine. Talk to your people about Eternal Security, and teach them about the faithfulness of God. Remind them that Jesus said, "he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) I believe that when you remind people of the loving faithfulness of God, they will be stronger in their faith, more joyful in their walk, and more prepared to carry out the kingdom work that God has planned for them.

Having said that, let's talk about the doctrine of election. The first thing I would like you to hear me say clearly is that we need to get this doctrine straight from the outset. It is a foundational doctrine.

There is a wonderful old story about an old man who lived his entire life back up in the hills. When he finally came down one year to visit an old childhood friend, he was amazed at the sights he saw, particularly the train and the iron tracks it rode on. Standing in the middle of the tracks one day, he was mesmerized by the distant sound of the whistle....wooooo, woooo....but he stood there too long and was hit by the train. Fortunately, it was just a glancing blow, but it still knocked him over and rolled him down the embankment.

Later, after he got out of the hospital, and was recuperating in his friend's home, he sat down with them for dinner. And they were brewing tea for the dinner in an old tea kettle. And it started to whistle that familiar and now scary sound....wooooooo! Springing into action, he grabbed a rolling pin lying on the counter and began to beat and smash the beautiful copper tea kettle into a shapeless hunk of junk. The family, looking at all this commotion, was speechless and had their mouths open. He could tell they were perplexed, so he explained his actions with this statement, "You have to kill these things when they're small."

We don't want to kill this doctrine of election, but we do want to understand it early and correctly! If we fail to get this one correct at the outset, bad things happen. History tells us that Particular Baptists in England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century got it wrong and suffered dire consequences. They began to look at election as not much more than the nearly capricious act of deity. John Gill, one of the most eminent hyper-Calvinists of England, believed that "election to eternal life was from eternity and did not depend upon nor begin with the believer's faith or perseverance in faith." (McBeth, p. 177)

Gill said that election was "free and sovereign; God was not obliged to choose any; and as it is, he chooses whom he will, . . .and the difference in choosing one and not another is purely owing to his will." (McBeth, p. 177; Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, 1:311) For those that God did not choose for salvation, the cause of their election to

damnation was not sin (because all had sinned), but simply, “the good pleasure of his will,” just because He decided to do so.

As a result of such thinking, gospel invitations to sinners, both in the worship service and in personal conversation, became understood to be “at best a waste of time, and at worst a violation of the sovereignty of God.” Consequently, evangelistic outreach came to a stand-still. (McBeth, p. 175)

In addition, this supreme and over-arching emphasis on the sovereignty of God (a good doctrine taken out of balance with Scripture) led Baptists in England to embrace Antinomianism. (McBeth, p. 172) They reasoned that if everything was fore-ordained, then not only was salvation a done deal, but also the personal behavior of believers. Therefore, believers were excused for any lapse in moral conduct because God had fore-ordained it!

1. May I simply say to you, this is not the God I know.

The God I know does not merely choose men in the past; He seeks them in the present! Jesus himself said that God is like the Father who is already out in the field looking and searching as the prodigal son works his way home. He wasn't sitting on the porch calmly saying to his friends, “That boy will turn up sooner or later.” The Bible says that when the Father saw him a long way off, he “had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20) That is not the language of arbitrary choice. That is the language of divine passion and divine initiative!

In 18<sup>th</sup> century England, Baptists recovered their spiritual vitality when Andrew Fuller began to urge his fellow ministers to present the Gospel with compassion for people, and to invite all people to receive Christ, and to leave the identification of a person as elect or not elect to God! He said, “It is the duty of ministers not only to exhort their carnal auditors to believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls; but it is at our peril to exhort them to anything short of it.” (McBeth, 183)

Why would anyone say such a thing? Only because there existed a hope of salvation; only because there existed an open salvation was not a predetermined inevitability; only because Fuller recognized they were in danger of working against God if they did not appeal to sinners! I know this also raises the issue of why Calvinists evangelize at all, and that question has been addressed by many authors. It seems to me that there is only one basic answer to that question: they do it out of obedience. But if God commands us to evangelize out of obedience only; if there is to be no passion for souls; if there is to be no broken heart for the lost, I again have to say, that is not the God I know. I believe that biblical and historical examples prove this point:

Listen to Paul's zeal and hope in II Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,

2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

.Listen to Paul's self-identification in II Corinthians 5:

19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Listen to Paul's desire in I Corinthians 9:

19 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

20 And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law;

21 to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.

This is not the language of formal obedience. This is again the language of passion!

Listen to Spurgeon. Spurgeon (who became the pastor of John Gill's church!) understood this. He understood that evangelism was a matter of heart and zeal. He said: "If God would have painted a yellow stripe on the backs of the elect I would go around lifting shirts. But since He didn't I must preach 'whosoever will' and when 'whosoever' believes I know he is one of the elect."

Listen to Carey. The great Baptist missionary William Carey, meeting with ministers in 1787, wanted to at least discuss the possibility that God wanted missionaries in the field. He was told, "Sit down young man, you are an enthusiast! When God pleases to

convert the heathen, He will do without consulting you or me.” (McBeth, p. 185) In a later meeting, Carey preached a two-part message: expect great things from God, and attempt great things for God. When the moderator of the meeting looked as if he would close the meeting without action, Carey pulled on his coat, and said, “Oh sir, is nothing to be done? Is nothing again to be done?” That is the kind of zeal that God has, and that God gives.

2. May I say to you also, that this hyper-Calvinist idea of a God who makes arbitrary choices and commands evangelism without passion is not the God of Scripture.

Look at Ephesians 1:1-13. You have read before that these verses are one long sentence in the Greek. They are a running thought. They are words joined in a passionate outburst from the human author, Paul, and the divine author, The Holy Spirit. Notice the recurring idea of “in Christ.”

Verse 1 calls us the “faithful in Christ Jesus.”

Verse 3 says we have been blessed “in Christ.”

Verse 4 says “He chose us in Him” so we would be “blameless before Him.”

Verse 6 says God’s grace was “freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

Verse 7 says “in Him we have redemption.”

Verse 9 says God’s grace was intentioned and purposed “in Him.”

Do not overlook this simple repeated wording. In his book, *Theology for the Community of God*, Stan Grenz has stressed that this passage is telling us that election is fundamentally corporate. Calvinists and Arminians argue about whether election is individual because God simply chose certain people (Calvinists), or individual because God foresaw future choices (Arminians). (Grenz, p. 591) Grenz is reminding us here that election is “in Christ.” We are not elected individually to salvation but rather mankind is elected to be included in the work of Christ. That is the all important context of election. So if we don’t get this passage right, our doctrine will be all wrong.

Herschel Hobbs affirmed that same idea when he wrote that election should not be regarded as God’s purpose to save as few as possible but rather as many as possible! The tenor of the Bible is that God loves all men and wishes to save as many as possible.” (Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, p. 65) Hobbs said that this passage is Paul’s most complete treatment of election, and that such election was “in Christ.” In short, Hobbs said that God chose the work of Christ as the means of our salvation, not the individual receivers of that work.

And yes, this means that human choice is something that God gives us. In regard to that issue, Hobbs reminded us that balance is essential. He said, "One should not magnify certain aspects of God's nature (sovereignty, will, power, and pleasure) to the neglect of others (righteousness, love). You cannot forget the free will of man and his power of choice. So while the sovereignty of God is an important doctrine, it is not the only doctrine in the Bible. So Hobbs helps us with the context of election and the necessary balance of election with other doctrines.

Ken Keathley, who has written the article on election and salvation in Danny Akin's new general theology, *A Theology for the Church*, has agreed about this issue of balance and has said that we have to see all parts of God's work together. He asserts that each of the following statements have to be part of the overall picture of salvation:

1. Salvation is a sovereign work of God from beginning to end.
2. Each person has the freedom to choose or reject.
3. Election originates, is accomplished in, and will be consummated, "in Christ." What does this mean? It means that election is a doctrine designed for our assurance and our comfort. Paul wrote this; the Spirit inspired this; so we would know that Christ is for us. (Akin, p. 722)

An interesting question that has come to my attention recently is the possibility that Calvinism as a whole was reactionary—that it responded to the assumptions of the state church that they controlled everything—and was a Protestant emphasis communicating that God, not the state church, controlled everything! It is an interesting question that we need to continue to study.

I think we can let the issue rest with John Leland, (one of the greatest Baptist spokesmen for religious liberty, and also a representative of the Sandy Creek tradition of Calvinism), who said, "The best theology had enough Calvinism to believe man was lost, and enough Arminianism to believe he could be saved." (McBeth, p. 274)

3. Finally, may I say to you that this God of the arbitrary choice is not the God people need to hear about. We live in a world of unbridled hurt. A line from the motion picture, *The Last Picture Show*, says, "Life is completely fair, it breaks everyone's heart." People are looking for good news, and we have it.

In his new book, *Unchristian*, David Kinnaman has constructed a spiritual and emotional portrait of younger boomers and older mosaics, or in other words, the one group in America that is the least evangelized and the least connected to the church when they are born again. Of the numerous characteristics of this group identified by Kinnaman, I want to call two to your attention. I think these two are perhaps the most significant.

- They are driven by relationships
- They understand Christianity primarily by what Christians are against.

It is here that our theology will make a great difference in reaching this hardened generation. It will do them little good to hear about cold determinism. Instead, they need to hear about the warm and willing heart of God who wants to begin a life-long relationship with them. It will do them little good to hear more of our ecclesiastical squabbling and endless reports of what we are against. Instead, they need to know that God is for them, loves them, wants them in His church, and is calling out to them through His Spirit. If we will deliver that message, if we will show them the very heart of God, then perhaps they will hear.

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