

February 26, 2012

Deut. 7:7-9 / John 15:9-17 / Romans 11:33-36 / Ephesians 1:11-13
Chosen and Predestined... To the Praise of His Glory

Today (as our passage makes clear) Paul's focus once again are the spiritual realities of *election* and *predestination*. And, therefore, if I'm going to explain the text, I must focus on them also -- and hopefully in the process, make clear, and a little less confusing -- a topic which we can never (in the end) fully and completely understand.

Paul says as much in Rom. 11:33: There, after expounding on election and predestination for 3 and 1/2 chapters, he concludes with this emotionally charged outburst: "***Oh the DEPTH of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How UNSEARCHABLE are his judgments; His paths BEYOND tracing out.***"

It's actually an outburst of praise which could best be paraphrased this way: The truths of God's grace in election and predestination are so wonderfully profound and spiritually deep, that they are far beyond the ability of even the most capable of renewed minds to fully comprehend them.

They are, "***unsearchable***," he says. They are, "***beyond tracing out***." That is, we can grasp their truth to a significant degree. But at some point, they take us so far into the infinite reaches of God's hidden wisdom, that the path we follow in our attempt to understand them, disappears behind the vaulted door of treasures so valuable, that God reserves them for His eyes alone.

Deut. 29:29 says, "***The secret things belong to the Lord our God (to Him alone and no one else), but the things revealed belong to us and our children, forever, that we might follow the words of this law.***"

Which means there are some things about these two divine mysteries that we will never be able to understand (affirming with Spurgeon, that at some point "reason" must rest in God). Yet, there are also many things we CAN indeed understand / because God has chosen to make them known to us. And insofar as He has / we are called to believe them / and affirm them / and proclaim them / and cherish them / and praise God for them.

So, let's consider the things we can know or those things God has made plain to all regarding election and predestination.

And as we look at the passage as a whole, the **FIRST** thing that he's made very plain regarding both election (that is, God's choosing of certain individuals to be in Christ before the foundation of the world) / and predestination (that is, His unthwartable determination, from eternity past, to save those He has chosen) is the fact that at least for Paul these two spiritual realities are ALWAYS spoken of as being precious, and wonderful truths.

And it's not just Paul. Nowhere in Scripture (and especially in the NT) will you EVER find these truths spoken of as anything but praiseworthy and good. Every time any biblical author speaks of them it is ALWAYS positive. Every time they are referenced, they are given, as either: Proof of a special love / a sign of particular mercy / expressions of special favor / or evidence of the richness and glory of a grace we could never, ever, deserve.

In 1 Peter 1:1-2 the apostle begins with this introduction -- given as a way of encouraging believers who are facing persecution: ***"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."***

"To God's elect" emphasizes the privilege it is to be chosen. / And, the word ***"chosen,"*** itself, emphasizes the special grace it is to be the object of the Father's electing love.

It also signifies a relationship of special favor with God. For as Jesus says in Mk 13:20 (of the intense suffering just prior to His return): ***"If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, He has shortened them."***

Because of the special status they have by virtue of being His elect, God will shorten the period of suffering that all would otherwise have to endure.

Then, in three separate verses Paul also tells us that election identifies people as the objects of a special love. Col. 3:12 says: ***"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with kindness..."***

I Thess. 1:4 says: ***"For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, because our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction." / And II Thess. 2:13*** says: ***"We ought always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved..."***

Election, then, identifies one as an object of God's special love / and explains why the Spirit moves with great power upon some and not others.

Election is also our assurance that no matter how bad things look, or how hopeless things look for the Church, God always reserves for Himself a 'chosen' remnant.

Thus Paul says in Rom. 11:5: ***"So too at the present time there is a remnant CHOSEN BY GRACE. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works, for if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then? What Israel (that is, the whole nation) sought so earnestly, it did not obtain. But the ELECT did (that is, the ones God chose from within the nation). "The others," he says -- that is, the non-elect "were hardened."***

Likewise, Jesus gives this truth as the basis for knowing that no matter where we go, He has "sheep" already there, just waiting to "hear and follow His voice." In Jn. 10:14 Jesus says: ***"I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me -- just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father -- and I lay down my life for the SHEEP."***

Then He says this: ***"I HAVE other sheep that are not of this pen (that is, not of the Jewish nation). I must bring them also."*** And notice the language of ownership which He uses for Gentiles who haven't even heard the Gospel yet! ***"I HAVE other sheep,"*** He says.

That is, in some way they already belonged to Him (even though it would be years before they themselves would ever hear the Gospel / or believe it / or come to know Him / and as a result, the fact that they had been chosen and predestined to be in Him from eternity past. In some way the elect are united to Him from eternity past, even though they will not know it by experience, until they come to faith.

And last, Paul says it's the need to reach God's elect or predestined ones that made him endure all the suffering that he did for preaching the Gospel. I Tim. 2:10 says: ***"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus."*** / A point he repeats again in Tit. 1:1: ***"Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect..."***

Or as the Living Bible rightly paraphrases it: ***"Paul, a servant of God, sent to bring the faith to God's chosen ones."*** His goal was not to reach every-one! He knew that not everyone would respond. Yet he also knew (from Jesus teaching) that "the elect" would respond. He did it for them.

That's the first thing we see! That for all the apostles, predestination and election were always seen as something wonderfully good and precious beyond words, and NEVER anything else -- EVER!

Which means: If we have a problem with them / or don't like them / or fight against them (as multitudes still do) / we are viewing them in a way the apostles (and even Jesus Himself) never did. (The Jesus who spoke of election many times / and made it crystal clear on at least one (so as to clear up any misunderstanding in the hearts and minds of His disciples): ***"You did not choose Me, but I chose you..."***)

And with that clarified (and it needed to be!) we can now look at the other three remaining points Paul stresses about election and predestination in vv. 11-13: They are **#1) God's Plan #2) God's work #3) God's Gift.**

So, **FIRST** let's look at election and predestination as part of what Paul calls "GOD'S PLAN" (v. 11). That is, ***"the PLAN of Him who works out everything in conformity to the purpose of His will."***

A plan He established in eternity past when He "choose" (or in the Greek, "chose as His inheritance" or "appointed by lot" a people for Himself. And after "choosing them to be His own possession" / or "appointing them by lot, to be His portion" / He then predestined them. / That is, He determined or immutably decreed in the unthwartable counsel of His own will (before the foundation of the world), that He would save those He chose.

That was His plan. And therefore, we can never truly speak of God's plan for the ages / or His plan of redemption / or the plan of salvation / without at some point informing the 'saved' that they were chosen or predestined to be saved.

(On the way into church this morning Word F.M. interestingly played a song where the repeated chorus line was: "*I chose Jesus, I chose Je-ee-sus, the One who first chose me.*")

At some point in the discipling of every believer it needs to be pointed out that God's "plan" is, and always has been, to save those He chose in eternity past to be His possession. And LISTEN: ***There has never been a time in all redemptive history when God worked in ANY OTHER WAY than to choose or elect and redeem a people for Himself.***

And interestingly, I know very few people who will ever disagree with me when I say that in reference to the Old Testament. They will readily admit that God specifically chose / and hand-picked Israel (out of all the peoples' of the earth) to be His own chosen people, inheritance or possession.

As we read in Deut. 7:7-9: ***"The LORD did not set His affection on you and choose you, because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all people's. But it was because the LORD loved you..."*** / It's the same thing we saw here in Eph. 1:5, where Paul says, ***"In love He predestined us to adoption as sons..."***

Or take Ps. 33:12: ***"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for His inheritance."*** / Or Amos 3:2, where God says of Israel, ***"You only have I chosen out of all the families of the earth..."***

So what do we find in the Old Testament? We find election and predestination from the beginning to the end! Out of the hundreds of nations on earth / or the thousands of people groups worldwide / God chose only one nation and one people to be His own special people. / One specific people to be the objects of His special affection, covenant love and saving favor.

And I know very few, if any, who deny that's just the way it was in the Old Testament. Personally, I don't know one. The OT is that clear.

Yet, when I tell those same people that what has taken place in the NT, is NOT that God stopped choosing or electing certain people, but instead, had graciously and mercifully chosen (as part of His plan from eternity past) to spread that electing grace far and wide (beyond the borders of Israel and to the ends of the earth) so as to include an massive number of Gentiles so large no man could ever count it / they will say, *"I don't believe that"* or *"That's not fair! Why would He choose some and not others?"*

And in a way, they're right. It isn't fair. In fact, it can't be. Because "election" is an act of grace, and grace is never fair. For in every case, grace is getting what we don't deserve. To be fair God would have to give us justice. And believe me folks, as sinners, you don't want justice!

And I stress all that, because I want you to know that Paul DID NOT "make up" the doctrines of election and predestination! (And neither did Calvin, as some people strangely, and somewhat ignorantly, suggest). ***They didn't PUT them there; they FOUND them there!***

And because Paul (and Jesus and Peter and John) found these realities in the OT and knew them to be the way that God works, they ALL carried them forward into the NT. Yet with one major difference: By the revelation of the Holy Spirit (2:5), they had come to see that ***"the mystery of God's will"*** (vv. 9-10) was that through the cross, God had chosen to include Gentiles to be a part of His ***"chosen people."*** His one body, and His holy nation, the Church (I Pet. 2:9).

In the NT God doesn't all of a sudden change from choosing particular people, to choosing no one in particular! Jesus, Paul, Peter and John make it perfectly clear that no such change has taken place. If it had they surely would have stopped using terms like "predestined," and ceased calling believers, "God's elect" / or referring to the saints as His "chosen people," or those He had, "predestined" in love, or "chosen in Christ" from before the foundation of the world.

The glorious message of the Gospel is NOT that God no longer chooses people / it's that out of the overflowing riches of His grace / He had chosen to include Gentiles in the number of the elect! An multitude too large to count (according to Rev. 7:9) from, ***"every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation on earth."***

"With Your blood," says Rev. 5:9, **"You purchased men for God from (or out of) every tribe, language, people and nation."** Not every person in every nation (as it makes clear), but "men" from (or out of) every nation.

As John Benton rightly states: **"[Christ] did not die for everybody. He died in the place of particular individuals. Which individuals? Anyone who believes in Him. He died in the place of all, who in every age, trust in Him... Jesus died for those who were in God's love and plan, united to Him from eternity past... [Though] it is only...when a sinner trusts Christ for forgiveness...that that union with Christ becomes a fact in his experience."**

Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing Paul shares about election and predestination in this passage: That bringing the elect and predestined ones to faith and the possession of salvation, is God's work. ***"In Him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will."***

So, according to this verse, who brings our salvation to pass and does the "work" of conforming everything to the purpose of His will? God does. And what is the "work" He does? Verse 12? He brings those whom He has chosen and predestined to the place of "putting their hope (for salvation) in Christ."

His "will" is to save them that they might be "to the praise of His glory." And the "work" He does is to make everything conform to that purpose of bringing chosen, predestined, elect Jews and chosen, predestined, elect Gentiles to the point where they place their faith and trust or "hope for salvation" in Christ and become part of His One Body, the Church (2:15).

Have you? Have you placed your faith and trust or hope in Christ? Because the issue is **NOT** to sit around and wonder or worry or agonize over whether or not you've been chosen or predestined. You can't know that for sure until after you do what the Gospel commands! Which is to believe / and look to Christ in faith / and place you hope for salvation in Him.

Our responsibility is not to mull over mysteries but believe His promises! It's to repent and believe the Gospel. And if you do, then, and only then, will you know yourself to be one of His elect.

Because in reality, faith or one's hope in Christ (as the text shows) is the only way to know we were chosen or predestined. As Luke writes in Acts 13:48, after seeing people's response to the Gospel, "***They were glad and honored the Word of the Lord, and all who were appointed (literally "destined") to eternal life, believed.***" Their faith was the evidence that they were chosen or destined (predestined) to receive eternal life.

LISTEN (I need to make this as clear as I can!): ***God does NOT choose or predestine us to salvation because He knew or foresaw ahead of time that we would believe. I hear that all the time.***

Yet think about it: Does His choosing someone because He knew ahead of time that they would believe lead one to praise and adore God for, "the incomparable riches of His grace?" (v. 6) Is there any mystery in that? (v. 9) Is that a sign of love, or is it simply getting what we deserve -- what's due to us, for making the right choice?

And even more so: Why on earth would God have to predestine people He knew were going to choose Him anyway? It's a head scratcher, isn't it? Because if that were the case, then predestination would become a useless irrelevant and irrational word to use. In fact, that's why people who believe that don't usually bother to mention or talk about it.

If God predestined us BECAUSE He knew we would believe, then it has no meaning! For God would NOT have to predetermine (by a divine decree made in eternity past) the salvation of someone He knew was going to come to faith anyway!

It would be like God decreeing the sun to shine tomorrow morning BECAUSE He already knows it will! It's ludicrous! You might as well toss the word out of the Bible -- which IS (essentially) what many who believe that, have indeed done in practice. It not only makes the term useless, it makes using it irrational.

The "elect" ARE those who choose Christ. But according to the Bible, the reason they choose Christ is because they were chosen and predestined by divine decree to do so -- by a God who then works everything in history, and in their life, to conform to that purpose.

In fact, it's this mysterious working of God / to bring about the salvation of those He has chosen / that causes so many people to testify to having sensed (long before they ever came to Christ) that God was "working" in their life. And not just working, but working out a predetermined plan which ultimately led them to Christ.

They sensed or witnessed certain things in their lives: Certain events and conversations and circumstances. People they didn't even know sent their way at just the right time / and miraculous deliverances where they should have died, but didn't that convinced them God was working in invisible, yet very distinct ways, to bring them to faith and salvation.

And I say that because I'm one such person. You surely are too. You look back on your life and you see things -- providential things or what you initially thought were "chance" things -- which you later realized, could only be explained as the invisible hand of God working out some type of plan for your life. Most all of us have such stories and even point to such things as being an integral part of what led us to Christ.

And quickly, though there are many, I just want to share THREE from my life. The **first** happened when I was between 8-10 years old, and was walking home one night at dusk. And as I walked along the side of my house (which has a granite ridge right next to it) I looked up - only for a second - because the sky was awash in the yellowish glow of the sunset.

And when I did, I saw the silhouette of a full grown man standing on the top of that hill and staring right at me. And it wasn't until I looked back down, and realized what I had seen, that I immediately looked back up to the same spot again -- only this time no one was there! Gone in a second! Yet I can still see the image of that man / and consider it to have been an angel.

The **second** was a very clear and unshakable and nearly audible call to the pastorate -- which I received when I was about 11 years of age -- 12 years before I was ever converted! Twelve years before I was even a Christian!
How could I not believe in predestination?!

Then **third**, soon after that I had a dream of three crosses, on a hill, silhouetted by a bright, iridescent, orange sky, with a person hanging on each one. The cross in the middle stood higher than the other two -- with what looked like monks, in dark brown robes, with their hoods pulled over their heads -- moving ever so slowly, back and forth below the cross.

And as I watched that scene, I was so filled with a feeling of indescribable peace, that I never wanted the dream to end! Though, like all dreams, it did. Leaving that image so burned into my mind that about 16 years ago (some 28 years later) I drew it from memory. (It's right here).

Add to that: Three other experiences while backpacking Europe (one in England / one in France / and one in Switzerland) / a healing I witnessed / an unexpected roadblock right after college that changed the entire direction of my life / and complete strangers who for some reason always felt led to witness to me... ***and it was hard not to feel that Someone was moving me in a direction I was not CHOOSING to go.***

With each event came a growing sense / and unshakable conviction / that God was working through the events of my life to bring me to Christ. To use Paul's words, He was, ***"working out everything (in my life) to conform with the purpose of His will"*** -- which was, (as Paul says) to bring one He had chosen to, ***"put their hope in Christ."***

That's why I can say, as our **LAST** point, that it was **GOD'S GIFT**. Because it was HIM who did the working, not me. It was Him working to make everything conform to the purpose of His will for my life -- to bring me to place my hope in Christ. In fact, the only "work" I did was running from His call!

As a sinner who enjoyed my sin, I was running from the sense that I was being led in a direction I didn't want to go and wasn't choosing for myself! Yet after 12 years of running (and being very tired from doing so) I did put my hope in Christ. And when I did, I was filled with joy and peace!

It was one grace after another from a God who refused to take no as an answer. The gift of God to an unworthy and rebellious sinner who never would have chosen Him unless He had first chosen me.