

Newsletter October 2013

This newsletter contains edited excerpts from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 3.4, *God Chooses his own*, and it is written as a follow-up to the topic of last month's newsletter concerning the bondage of man's will found in Book I, Chapter 3.2. In our September 2013 newsletter we found that man cannot exercise his own will to turn to God in search of salvation because his will is in bondage to sin that prevents it. Salvation is therefore not dependent upon the determined will of fallen man. It is fully up to God to intervene with a new birth of man's spirit (cf. Newsletter November 2012) thus awakening him through a gift of faith to realize and receive the truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. It is apparent that God has not chosen to save everyone, inasmuch as the world in the past as well as today have been and are filled with great numbers of those to whom the Gospel seems but absurd nonsense to be ignored, and still others who violently reject Christ and consistently revile his name, until death finally overtakes them all. Therefore, we discover that God has specifically chosen those who are to be saved through a sovereign process that we refer to as "divine election," while He has allowed others to continue on their path to destruction unhindered.

God's divine election is based solely upon his foreknowledge firmly established through his preordination such that the elect have been unconditionally sealed for salvation prior to their natural birth on earth — even before the beginning of the world (cf. 2Ti.1:9). As the Apostle Paul said, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Ro.8:29). It is very important at the outset that we make a strong differentiation between predestination and the philosophical teachings of determinism and fatalism (cf. Book I, Chapter 3.2, page 159). Determinism states that all things come about as a consequence of previous events as a cause sufficient to do so. That is, based upon what has previously happened, all future events are predetermined without exception as a result of an unalterable chain of events. This concept is useful mathematically but much less useful regarding material processes since it would of necessity ignore any unexpected variations that may occur in the chain. It fails utterly when we move to the matter of man's will and moral choices that are not in any way based upon unalterable physical laws, as rigid philosophical determinism would suppose. If that philosophy were to be carried through to its logical theological conclusion, none of the fallen race of mankind could ever be saved from eternal destruction inasmuch as there would be no way that a man or woman's destructive course of sin could be altered once it had inevitably begun at birth. Unlike determinism, fatalism states that a series of events must happen in the future regardless of any individual choices that are made. Fatalism states that there is a hidden mindless regulating force or agency that controls outcomes at random. Human choices therefore become meaningless as the unpredictable principles of chance command man's destiny.

Preordination as expressed by the Apostle Paul differs greatly from both determinism and fatalism inasmuch as Paul acknowledges the existence of an almighty God who is able and willing to unconditionally intercede for fallen man to alter his course of action at a chosen time within his lifespan. Thus, nothing is left to blind chance. A man who is bent upon self-destruction because of his corrupted will can still be saved regardless of past events that have occurred in his life or of any sinful choices he may have previously made. Once his will is released from bondage by the Holy Spirit, who suddenly indwells him in the new spiritual birth from above, a man's future choices that are then based upon true repentance, become beneficial in sealing his salvation.

Some would dare to ask how God could find fault with those who continue on the path to destruction only because He has not willed that they be saved (Ro.9:19). In answer, we must first understand that God does not need to take any action for men and women to receive their just punishment in Hell. All are born into the world with a sin nature thus rendering them already dead in trespasses and sin that seals their ultimate destiny. God does not ever take any direct action to send people to Hell. God in his divine wisdom has only determined not to interfere with the pell-mell rush toward destruction of multitudes through sovereign choice, thus reserving them for a divine judgment that is well deserved. Therefore, God's work in the redemption of mankind is totally positive as many by his divine will are born anew in the Spirit. If man were to be put in God's place, human reasoning would demand that all such disobedient, rebellious and hopelessly depraved

creatures be automatically written off as unredeemable and deserving of their appointed destruction without exception. The act of God's unmerited mercy and grace to redeem those of his own out of a totally depraved mankind while not choosing to save others is therefore far beyond human comprehension. It also accounts for the overwhelming love and devotion the redeemed have for Christ their savior, as they experience all trespasses and sins forgiven hence restoring peace and fellowship with their Creator from which they were once alienated.

The common argument against the Scriptural doctrines of preordination and divine election is that God is not being fair handed, which if so would seriously question his integrity. Such questioning would rise to the level of blasphemy. For that reason, the doctrine of preordination is commonly rejected out of hand sensing a supposed need to defend God's holiness. We must understand, however, that fairness is a concept that is valid only among equals, particularly so between all members of the human race, not between the Creator and that which He has created. We cannot be so bold as to dictate to God how He will exercise his merciful grace since none of us deserve to experience it as we have already put forth. Could we then set ourselves up to judge God as to his intended purpose for his own creation? "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Ro.9:20). All men have fallen under the headship of Adam and fully deserve eternal death and destruction (cf. Ge.2:17). God in the beginning pronounced by his "decretive will" (i.e. by decree) that the soul that sins shall surely die — even before Adam had sinned (cf. Ge.2:17; Ex.18:20); God's holiness demands it as a statement of fact. Death is therefore the inevitable consequence of sin requiring no intervening action on God's part to carry out the sentence. God exercises mercy in the extreme when He chooses to save any man from that destruction! "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Ro.9:18), as is his sovereign right to do. We must therefore conclude that each individual is specifically chosen by God, yes, even created by God for salvation or for instruments of his wrath according to his divine will (cf. Ro.9:21–23).

The biblical doctrine of divine election has obvious implications for most forms of contemporary evangelism, which has largely degenerated today into an "easy believism" lacking any genuine substance in repentance or persistence. The widespread message of the Gospel is truly a universal invitation for every man and woman to repent and accept Christ. There is no exclusion in the human sense as is evident by the word "whosoever" that appears in many of Jesus' statements: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn.3:16). "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Mt.10:32). The "whosoever" can only be those who are the elect since all others automatically reject Christ. We also read that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe.3:9). However, the word "any" in this last verse must refer to any of the elect that are temporarily wandering about lost in the sea of debased humanity or else the word "willing" as it is found in this verse must in context refer to the "desirative will" or deep yearning of God for all of mankind, inasmuch as God has not declared anywhere in Scripture that all men will be saved. Quite the contrary, Jesus Himself declared that many would be cast into Hell (cf. Mt.13:49,50; Re.21:8).

Many will be called by the Gospel, but few will be chosen (cf. Mt.20:16). Here we must make a distinction between the lost and the reprobate (i.e. those abandoned to eternal damnation and whom the Gospel only hardens). God seeks out the lost, whom He has previously elected in eternity to redeem, but reprobates are those He has not chosen to redeem and are thus abandoned to their own devices, which are deserving of judgment. Because many men and women, for a time, appear to accept the teachings of Jesus and then turn away, some would falsely assume that it is possible for true believers to lose their salvation once received; this is not possible as Scripture makes very clear (cf. Jn:10:28). Many are attracted (called) to Christ for various reasons both honorable and dishonorable, but they have not been specifically chosen by God to receive eternal salvation (Judas Iscariot is the classic Scriptural example). These are not the lost that God diligently seeks out to redeem, but the reprobate that do not come in by the Door of the sheepfold of the elect but sneak in some other way with evil intent (cf. Jn.10:1,7). Many of these are attracted by the general call of the Gospel and

perhaps outwardly perform great religious works for a time with very dubious, even disastrous, results (cf. Jude:1:4,10-16). Later, as their true nature is exposed, their personal interest wanes, or the work becomes burdensome to them they depart from their false confession of faith (cf. 1Jn. 2:19).

Consequently, we find that the Gospel's universal invitation does not automatically result in universal salvation since not all will truly repent and come to believe. Universal salvation (as if such could ever be considered a reality) would not require any response on the part of mankind to repent; all would be automatically saved as a consequence of Jesus' atoning death — along with their sinful nature. God's justice would then be thwarted and Heaven would be spoiled with the same evil that besets the earth today. God would have abdicated and Satan would have won; evil would have parity with good. Scripture makes it very clear that not all men will be saved when it warns very clearly about eternity in Hell for the reprobate (cf. Ps.9:17; Mt.7:13; 13:49,50; 22:13; etc.).

The doctrine of election also brings forth assurance. Without the firm knowledge that it is God who has chosen us rather than we choosing Him, we could never reach full assurance of our eternal relationship with Him. We would constantly fear that we could let go of our faith in a moment of human weakness and deny Him — losing all. However, since God has chosen us, we can be fully secure in the knowledge that God will not ever change his mind and let us go (cf. Jn.10:29). In this unshakable assurance, our faith is strengthened and our choice to follow Christ is made firm by the express will of God. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance..." (1Th.1:4,5). It was God working within them through the Holy Spirit that brought forth that assurance. Only in the firm knowledge that we have been unconditionally elected of God can we experience true assurance of salvation and hope of eternal life to follow. We agree with Paul that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Ro.8:16). The Apostle John wrote, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life..." (1Jn.5:12,13). Such assured knowledge does not come to us as a result of some intellectual prowess that led to a decision that we have made, but rather it comes about from an inner perception that God Himself has given us when He reached down to redeem us. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1Jn.5:20).

Therefore, we find that salvation is not in any way the result of some decision that we have made as a result of some chance happening in our life, nor is it found in some religious ritual or a recitation of words that we have performed; it is God Himself who is the exclusive source of our salvation. We are held secure in a salvation not of our derelict works, but completely of God's grace. In this we can see the amazing power of God's grace to save even the worst of sinners. Since we through God's grace have been set free from sin's bondage we also have attained the certainty of salvation. We need no longer fear that in a moment of weakness we may lose our faith and turn away from God. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Ro.8:15). We have been created anew in Christ to do the good works that God has set forth for us to do and are sent forth in the world as sons to freely do our Father's will (cf. Ep.2:10).

When you look back on that time when you decided to follow Jesus and perceive that you were drawn to Him by a power beyond your own strength, you have some understanding of the wonder of divine election. In all outward appearance, the decision to follow Jesus seems to be ours alone; yet, we were drawn to that decision by an inner belief that sprang to our minds in the new birth. Through that unconditional gift of faith, man, who could not respond to God's will, being before inhibited by the weakness of the flesh, is now enabled to respond in obedience to Christ with a great holy desire. Therefore, we must accept the fact that God, working through the Holy Spirit, has given us even the power to believe. Praise God for his infinite mercy and for his wondrous good will toward us — by God's grace alone we are saved through the marvelous gift of faith (Ep.2:8)! © Arthur J. Smith October 2013