

## **Systemic Summary of Election, I**

Let us go back to R.C. Sproul's book, *Chosen by God*, and review a bit. At the bottom of page 118, R.C. Sproul says, "Regeneration precedes faith." What does that mean? Well, I think we might be able to say it a little clearer than this. The word, "precedes," causes us to think in terms of time. Actually, regeneration and faith normally occur at the same moment. We can conceive of things that are simultaneous in terms of time but where there is also cause and effect. So I would agree with him. It is like flipping on the light switch, which causes the lights to come on. It is instantaneous for all purposes unless you are an electrician. But the flipping of the switch is the cause of illumination in the room. I would agree with him that when God gives us new life, it causes us to believe in Christ. In fact, there is a debate among evangelical Christians about which one comes first in terms of cause and effect. And good people disagree. I think Sproul could be clearer when he says, "precedes." Somebody could get the idea that we are born again one week and we believe a couple of months later. That is not what he intends. He intends that it all happens at once. Our faith is a reflex reaction to the grace of God that has invaded our lives.

One student has pointed out how Sproul's book is helpful to him because prior to reading this, he had a nagging doubt that perhaps he would have done a better job than Adam. But after reading page 93, he saw that the Lord really did choose Adam as a fair and just representative. In fact, we really would not have done a better job than he did.

Another issue that true believers disagree on that the book mentions is whether or not we can lose our salvation. Sproul claims that we cannot, and there are many verses that back that up. I would agree, although I would admit there are verses on the other side that appear to be problematic. But I do agree. Although Sproul's book is not really about that subject, he covers all different areas. One area of debate among evangelical Christians is whether or not we can fall away from God's grace after He has saved us. It seems to be really clear that we cannot.

How does the issue of predestination affect evangelism? I will tell you with embarrassment that in the history of Christian theology and in the history of religion, those who have held to the same view of predestination as Sproul (and I) have, at times, not been zealous for the Gospel. I am ashamed to say that because whatever else is right in the world, that is wrong. The Bible is so plain that it is the Lord's will for us to get the Gospel out to every human being. Let us go to that now. This is as good as any time.

Why evangelize? I have three reasons. We talked about these before. First, we evangelize because we are ignorant of whom the elect are. God is God. We are not God. It is His work to elect. It is His work to die and rise again. It is His work to open hearts. Acts 16 says, "As Paul preached the Gospel, the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the things Paul was telling her." Paul could not do that to anybody's heart. Neither could Peter. Neither can we. Only the Lord can do those great works of salvation. We are ignorant of whom the people of God are. We do not know who they are, so our job is to love the people the Lord brings into our lives, pray for them, share the good news with them, and look for God to work in their lives. So why do we evangelize if God has chosen some people and not others? Because we do not know who the elect are. They do not come with big E's on their shirts.

Second, why do we evangelize? I do not oppose Sproul's answer: we evangelize because God has commanded it. That is a good answer. But we can probe deeper than that. This is why he has commanded it. He is God. He alone knows the identity of the elect. We do not. So, the second reason is because God has ordained and uses the means of person-to-person contact to bring people to Himself.

A comment was made that Sproul suggests that regeneration is the work of God alone. Is Sproul doing justice to the biblical emphasis upon preaching and teaching and the need to get the Gospel out? Maybe he is not, but I would not adjust what he said about regeneration because it simply is the work of God alone. We cannot make ourselves alive to God. But by the same token, God does use means in bringing people to Himself. We can cite examples from our everyday lives. Our ultimate confidence in our health and well-being as individuals is not in our exercise programs. It is not in taking vitamins or in what great shape we keep ourselves in. Rather, our confidence is in God to take care of us, is it not? Ultimately? We trust in Him for our well-being. And yet we all do things to stay healthy. For example, we probably eat every day. We try to sleep every day. And it would be good if we could have an exercise program to take care of our bodies. That is, we do not see incompatibility between our doing things to take care of ourselves and God's sovereignty. For somebody to say, "Well, why am I not eating again for the fifth straight day and not sleeping? Oh, because God is in charge." That would be foolish. That is, we understand that God uses means in the area of taking care of us. We give Him the credit for taking care of us but we also take care of ourselves under God. It is the same way in providing for our families. The person who would say, "Oh, I trust God to provide for my family so I do not need to work," would be a foolish person indeed. Why? Because God uses means. The normal way He provides for families is through people being gainfully employed. We do not have any problem seeing God as the ultimate provider—not ourselves, not our disability programs. He is the ultimate provider and yet we go to work.

In the same way, God is the Savior. He alone chooses His people. He alone dies and rises again to save them and He alone unlocks their hearts, but He uses means. There are two kinds of people in the world and they are both sinners. There are those who are still unforgiven sinners and there are those, like ourselves, who are forgiven sinners. Here is God's program. He uses forgiven sinners who do not forget that they are still sinners to reach out in compassion and mercy to those who are still unforgiven. Could He have chosen some other way? Could He have sprinkled angel dust on the elect to bring them to Himself? I do not know. I guess so. I do not like speculation myself. But I tell you what. He has not chosen to do it that way. He has chosen to use person to person contact in witnessing the Gospel.

Third, why do I evangelize if God is the sovereign Lord who saves His people with or without me? Actually, God saving people by election gives us confidence that He will bring results. Revelation 4 and 5 has people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation around the throne of the Lamb, worshipping Him. So we can go with confidence to any people group, situation, or language and learn the language and share the Gospel and expect God to produce results.

So, instead of turning off evangelism, an emphasis on God's sovereignty should stimulate evangelism and encourage us to look for results. It should also purify our means in evangelism. We do not need to use any tricks, hype, or arm-twisting, because we really cannot save people, can we? We need to present the Gospel. We do not try to make it as hard as we can for people to be saved. You know we do not do that. We plead with people to be reconciled with God (2 Corinthians 5). We do need to invite them to receive the Savior, to believe in His name. And yet we can stay away from all kinds of manipulation because it does not do any good. It gives people false assurance. And there are people who we meet who tell us, "Oh, I have tried that. I have tried Jesus," when, in fact, they were manipulated and they really did not taste the grace of God for themselves. Now they are worse off than if they had not heard it in the first place.

The question is often asked, "Can we not grow weary if we share the Gospel with the same people and even our families?" Sharing the Gospel with your relatives? can be the hardest thing. When you share

with them, do you try to push the Gospel on them? You cannot do that. After a while, it is discouraging. Here is an encouraging passage in John 15. After the vine and the branches, Jesus said some amazing things in John 15, verses 18 and following: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." It is the one place in Bible I know where the Son of God is spoken of as the author of election. "Remember the words I spoke to you. No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also." That is a word of realism. It can be so hard, especially with people we love. It is a godly Christian who does not build up walls in the workplace, neighborhood, or family when he or she is rebuffed or persecuted day after day. So realism says we can expect them to reject us and the Gospel. But we should make sure that it is not because we are being obnoxious but because of the offense built into the Gospel itself. We do not want to be offensive. But there is good news! The next verse, John 15:20, says, "If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also, because a servant is not greater than his master." Jesus received two responses to his ministry. (By the way, this was already introduced in John chapter 1.) The first response Jesus receives is the negative one: "He came to his own and his own received him not." Then comes the positive one: "As many as received Him..." John is indicating the realism of the situation. More people are going to reject our witness than accept it, but some will accept it. "If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." So the fact that Jesus got two responses to His ministry assures us as His disciples that we are going to get two responses. If it were not for the grace of God, we would have no confidence and there would be no positive response. So thank the Lord that He does still work today, that He brings people to Himself. We are evidence of that. In some of our cases, people prayed for us and were patient with us for years. I knew a godly man whom the Lord saved. A few years later he saved his brother and together they prayed for another unsaved brother for 40 years until he was won to Christ. And they still had another brother, a fourth one who was not a believer. I think he passed away in that condition.

So whom are we to evangelize? Okay. We were talking about why, but what about the question of whom? With whom should we share the Gospel? To those people God brings into our lives. Well, then the question comes, "Is that rather haphazard or should we look for the hand of God in our lives?" Of course we should. Is the providence of God not operative and active in our lives? Yes. And the Lord does not give us burdens for people or bring people into our lives without a purpose. I am not saying that we know God's plan perfectly. We cannot just go dividing up the elect and the non-elect. We cannot. The Bible warns us. Everybody would have thought Judas was one of God's people. He fooled all of the disciples. The man went out to betray the Master and they thought he was either making a contribution to the poor or buying something for the feast. So you can be fooled. On the other hand, we can think people are beyond the grace of God, but look at the dying thief. I tell you, if the man's mother were a saint, she would not have had any confidence that that boy was saved. She would have thought, "He is a bad boy. He is getting what he deserves. He has murdered people. He has done terrible things." But God's grace reached him.

So, we are not infallible on this. Underneath that humility to let God be God, we look for God to work. And we get up in the morning and say, "Lord, bring people into my life. Use me as You would." The hard part, however, is seeing the same unsaved people day after day on the job. Somehow, we do not seem too wonderful to them. As a matter of fact, we can be a big pain in their sides and drive them crazy. They may not like us, but the Lord has different purposes. Maybe He wants to refine us, and in His grace He sometimes reaches in and grabs some of those people. I do not have all the answers.

It is time for us to tie things together. After all, this is a course in systematic theology. We took time and studied the big passages that deal with election. We need to wrap them up and pull them together in a way that gives us some coherence.

I am on page 25 of *Chosen by God*, and we are working with a systematic summary of election, an overview. We are especially interested here in the apostle Paul's teaching at the bottom of 25. Do you see where I am? Paul teaches on the time of election and then on the basis of election. On page 26, it addresses double predestination, which is a hard saying indeed. Then Paul talks about the plan and means of salvation and the goal of it, and finally about the believers' response on page 27.

Look back at page 25. The first matter is Paul on the time of election. Paul alone in the Bible, it seems to me, gives us the timing of God's election. In Ephesians 1:4 he says that "God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world." That is not the only place where God said it. If He said it clearly once, that is all He had to do, but He also says it in 2 Timothy 1:9. There we learn that God purposed to grant us grace before the beginning of time, before the eternal ages, or as one translator rendered it, "before all eternity." Why does God tell us that He chose us before creation? What is He doing by saying that? What is the Lord's point? Why does he tell us that? The answer is that it is one way of telling us that we have nothing to do with God's choosing us. God even says it more explicitly than this. If election is before creation, it is one way of saying we did not have a whole lot to do with it. I cannot help but think of the words of Romans 9. Before Jacob and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad, God chose one. And before any of us were born, before we were even made, God chose us. Now there is a question I cannot answer and that is, "Why in the world did the Lord choose me?" I cannot answer that one. In a minute I am going to say it is because of God's grace and will. The other answer is so that we would worship Him, O Christians. But there is nothing in us to commend us to God. It is because He is a gracious God. Why did He not choose everybody? I do not know. Ask Him sometime. In other words, He is free in His grace to choose whom He wants to choose. He is not under obligation to choose us. In His justice He could have allowed all of us to suffer what we deserve for our sins. But in His mercy, He chose, before the creation of the world, to save multitudes and multitudes of people—billions of human beings. Such a teaching at the end of that paragraph excludes any effort on the part of human beings. You say, "It is completely taking my hands off of my salvation." That is right. You say, "Well, I feel like I am losing something. I am losing some control." You never had it in the first place. You just were a little bit confused. And if you do take your hands off of it like that, you say, "It becomes more wondrous to me." I have more occasions to praise God for doing for me what I could not do. It also gives me a sense of security in the center of my life. Does it make me want to run out and live like the devil? Not if I am really saved, it does not. It makes me grateful. It is like having an earthly father who says, "You are in trouble, son or daughter, but I will love you no matter what you do. There is nothing you could ever do that would cause me to put you out of my family. You could turn your back on me or do all kinds of things. I would still love you and you would belong to our family." Our heavenly Father is like that. He is the Lord of creation and of salvation, and the Bible teaches it. We did not make it up. He planned redemption even prior to creation. So, probing into some of those matters that He planned before creation is not altogether wrong because the Bible talks about them. But I am not sure how confidently we can claim to understand what went on in the divine mind and in what order He processed these things.

Now, let us talk about the basis of election. Paul explicitly gives the basis for God's eternal election. In our study of John in Acts, we concluded that although we were not told the ground or basis of election, a doctrine of God's foreseeing man's faith did not fit the data. If we have time in this lesson, we will look at a couple of those passages. Paul does not contradict what was said earlier. He tells us the answer, and

we will look at it both negatively and positively. First of all, let us look at it negatively. The basis of election is not human desire or effort. Paul tells us negatively that the ultimate cause is mercy—with an emphasis on the word “ultimate.” Of course we are saved because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the question is “Why do we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?” Well, because Jesus died in order to save us. Is that as far back as we can go? No. The Bible says God did something before He even created. He chose His people. The ultimate cause of our receiving mercy is not human willing or running (Romans 9:16), not human desiring or doing, but rather God’s freedom in showing mercy. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul teaches that God did not save us because of our doings, because of our works, but because of His own purpose and grace. His purpose and His grace are put over against our deeds. In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul says, “God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ,” and so forth. “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” The fact that we have received grace is not because of anything we have done. In fact, God purposed to grant us that grace before the creation of the world. So, I am more explicitly discussing the basis of election. First of all, in negative terms, the basis is not our will or our works. Positively, the basis is God’s love and His will.

Let us go through this one last time. In answer to the question, “Why am I saved?” the Bible gives a number of reasons. The immediate one is because I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ when I heard the Gospel, and that is a true answer. It does not nullify the answer of election, since the true answer, “I am saved because I believe,” is true. However, it is not the ultimate answer. If you go further back, it is because somebody prayed for us, and the Lord brought somebody to us with the Gospel. You may have taken a Gideon Bible out of a desk drawer and read it in a hotel room, or you may have had a different experience. Further back than that, the only reason we were saved is because Jesus did something for us in the first century. If He did not do that work for us, we would not be saved, right? That is more important than my faith. I am not saved apart from my faith. But if I have faith in the wrong stuff, I am not going to be saved. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ saves. Faith is the instrument. His work is really what saved me. Is that the ultimate reason why we are saved? No. Because the Bible says before God created the world, He chose a people for Himself. So we are dealing with ultimate matters here. Considered negatively, it is not what we do. Positively, in one word, it is God.

Can we be more specific? Yes. It is two things about God. It is His will and His compassion. It is His love and His choosing. It is His sovereignty and His grace. Paul also, at the top of page 26, sets forth the positive basis of election—the gracious will of God. He teaches that election is rooted in God’s good pleasure, His will. Believers have been predestined to salvation according to the purpose of God who affects all things according to the purpose of His will (Ephesians 1). How emphatic Ephesians 1:11 is! How many times in one verse does Paul have to say it? “In him we were also chosen...”—God is choosing—“having been predestined...”—God’s choosing—“according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.” The emphasis here is on God’s will. In discussing the basis of election, the first ground for our election is God’s will and the second is His love.

In 2 Timothy 1:9 it says that God purposed to grant His people grace before creation. God, as Creator, has mercy on whomever He wills (Romans 9). Remember that? “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy.” Here we find God’s sovereign will and His mercy side by side. So that last reference combines His will, His mercy, and His love. And that is indeed the apostle’s thought. The ultimate cause of human beings experiencing God’s mercy is not human desire or effort, but God’s freedom in showing mercy.

Let us continue on in this emphasis on God's love as the reason why we are saved. God's choice of His people for salvation is an election based on His grace. We will look at Romans 11 in a minute. "In love"—in *love*—"He predestined us to the adoption as sons to Himself" (Ephesians 1:5). In 2 Timothy 1:9 it is God's grace that He purposed to grant to believers before creation. Do you see the twofold emphasis? If Janet says, "Professor, ultimately why am I saved?" My ultimate answer is, "Janet, you are saved ultimately because of God's love and because of God's will." Can I get any further back than that? No. But the question is still, "Why did He choose me?" Because He loved you and He chose to save you. That is all He wrote. That is it. That is the ultimate answer to the question as God has revealed it to us. And negatively, it is not our choice of Him and certainly not our goodness. Paul says that those whom God loved beforehand, if my understanding of foreknowing is correct, He predestined to be conformed to Christ's image.

Next, Paul addresses double predestination. Paul teaches an election of the wicked as well as that of the righteous. This is not his main emphasis. And so it should not be our main emphasis either. This should have a part in our ministries in the same proportion that the Bible mentions it, which is not often. So, if somebody makes a big deal about double predestination, they are out of whack, in my estimation. They are imbalanced. And if somebody meets you and is talking about that after two minutes, something is wrong somewhere. Do you understand? Now maybe we have neglected this thing completely, and that is not right either. But we do not want to major on minors. The Lord talks about election many times and almost every time He talks about it, with the exception of a few passages, He emphasizes why you, O Christians, are indeed Christians. God sent His love upon you before He made the world. The purpose of that is to make us thankful, to motivate us to evangelism, to motivate us to live for God, and to make us worshippers. In a couple of places in Scripture, the apostle Paul does teach a double predestination. I will leave you to your own conclusions, but I also must teach it if that is what he says.

In Romans 9:22-24, God as Creator prepared beforehand vessels of mercy for glorification. Paul's use of the potter imagery compels me to conclude that the vessels of wrath were people prepared beforehand by God for destruction. This is not all the Bible has to say about the lost. Chiefly, it says they are lost because of their sins. Is that true? Yes, it is true. Study the judgment passages. People are condemned for what they thought, said, and did. Is that the ultimate reason why they are condemned? No. The ultimate reason is that God contemplated them as sinners and He determined to allow them to suffer the penalty for their sins. So I am not saying that we are ultimately the masters of our own fate. God justly condemns us for our sins, and He is in charge of every person's fate.

Let us turn to Romans 11, a passage that we have not studied before. Romans 11:1 says, "I ask then, did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people whom He foreknew." Here is a test case. Does it mean He foresaw what their responses would be, or does it mean whom he foreloved? Let us try it out. "Do you not know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah? He appealed to God against Israel. 'Lord!' Elijah cried out. 'They have killed your prophets and torn down your altars and I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me.' And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" You say, "Professor, this looks like it fits the Arminian model. God reserved for Himself the people He foreknew. That is, He looked forward and saw who would bow the knee to Baal and who would not, and He chose the faithful ones, right?" Wrong. The emphasis in the quotation in verse 4 is not where I put it. I will put it now on the words "reserved for myself" and watch how that reads in light of verse 5: "And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself'"—emphasis on God's grace—"7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' At the present time, there is also a remnant chosen by grace. And if it is by grace then it is no longer by

works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then?”—It sounds like Romans 9, does it not?—“What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened.” Here is a remarkable thing. According to Romans 11:7, first century Israel is divided into two subsets: the elect, or chosen ones, and the others. What I am trying to say is, it looks to me like Romans 11:7, in this context, teaches the same thing as Romans 9. First century Israel consisted of the elect and the others. God, out of His grace, chose many people for eternal life. God, out of his justice, permits many others to pay the penalty for their sins. Admittedly, there is a mystery here, yet Paul sets forth a doctrine of double predestination. I have to do the same. You see, it is not a matter of what I like or what I would do if I were God. I am not God. It does not matter what we like. Our job is to try as hard as we can to understand what God has said. If He has not said this, then do not believe it. Do not just believe it because I said it. But it looks to me that is exactly what is going on in Romans 9 and now again in Romans 11.