

## **Systematic Summary of Election, II**

We are now discussing God's plan and means of salvation. I am in the middle of page 26 of *Chosen by God* by R.C. Sproul. Paul put God's predestination of His people into a larger plan of salvation. Remember that section, "Those whom he foreknew he predestined..." he called, he justified, and he glorified. He loved His own before creation unto glorification in Christ's image. The work of salvation is planned and brought about by the Lord. So, election is part of a bigger plan. The point is, election is part of this big plan, and God then uses a means to effectuate that plan, to bring it to pass. That is what the next paragraph says. God uses means to accomplish and implement His plan of salvation. He chose His people in Christ. According to Ephesians 1, He planned, from the beginning, to join them to Christ in salvation. God granted us His grace in prospect of union with Christ before creation. In the fullness of time, God manifested that grace through the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Our point is this: God did not merely choose us. He chose us and also planned to send His son to save us. Not only that, but he planned to send His spirit to join us to His Son so that salvation might actually be ours. So election is not by itself. It is part of a bigger plan, and God brings that plan to pass. God used the initial sanctification of the Holy Spirit and faith in the Gospel as His means to bring about His eternal purposes. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul says, "But we ought always to thank God for you, brother loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved."

Now here is how God planned to bring that salvation about. Here is His means. He chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. That is the means that God used. The initial sanctification of the Spirit and faith in the Gospel are His means of saving us. He called you to this through our Gospel (verse 14) that you might share in the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Why does Paul teach these things? The next verse makes it plain. "So then, brothers, stand firm." He teaches these things in order to give them stability in their Christian lives. "Stand firm and hold on to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter."

So, the Bible puts election in as part of a big plan and shows that God uses means to implement that plan. God called to salvation the vessels of mercy whom He had prepared beforehand for glory. Remember that passage? "Vessels of mercy," Paul says, "whom he prepared beforehand for glory." That includes us, whom he also called, not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles (Romans 9:23- 24). God called, justified, and even glorified, those whom he fore-loved and predestined to salvation.

So, those five verbs of salvation in Romans 8:28-30 also speak of a big plan of salvation and of God using means to bring His people to Himself. The picture is clear. God had purposed salvation from beginning to end. He has ordained the means to accomplish redemption through Christ to bring salvation to His people and to keep them saved until their glorification.

What is God's goal in electing a people for Himself? Well, we can answer this for believers and for God Himself. Paul alone gives us God's final goal toward which His election of His people moves. That goal is the final confirmation of God's people in holiness so that they may become like the Lord Jesus Christ. That way, believers are made like Christ, their brother. Ephesians 1:4 says, "God chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." There is the purpose of election. God's ultimate goal is to finally sanctify us. Romans 8:29 says it a little bit differently: "Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son that he might be the firstborn

among many brothers.” Remember that passage? So, there the goal of election is ultimately conformity to Christ. We are going to be like Christ. We are never going to be a unique second person of the Trinity. But like the Son of God, we are going to become glorified and completely made holy when we are with the Lord.

Look at the top of page 27. Another way of looking at the goal is in terms of glory. The end of salvation is the glorification of the believer. That glory is certain in God’s plan. It is so certain that you could use the same simple past tense for that future glory as Paul did for the other aspects. The people of God are those whom God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. The glory, which God’s people will share, is the very glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. We just read that in 2 Thessalonians 2:14. We keep using the same passages and showing how they teach these different aspects of things. There we read this: “Brothers, we are always to thank God for you because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. God called you to this through our Gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Ephesians 1, in the context of the work of the Trinity for salvation, Paul teaches that the ultimate goal is cosmic. It is to bring all things together in Christ. The saints on earth, the saints in heaven, and maybe even the good angels, are in view there—perhaps also the redemption of the creation itself, such as is spoken of in Romans 8 and in the last two chapters of the Bible where we learn of the new heaven and new earth.

What is the goal of election for God Himself? It is His glory, the praise of His grace. What should our response be to the fact that God has elected us and other believers as well? What should our response be to these things? On page 27, God is to be praised. Ephesians 1:3 says, “Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us, in him, before the creation of the world...” The very context there is praise to God for His grace as it says again in verse 6. Verse 5 says, “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace.” What is my response when I read in the Scriptures and learn that although I chose God, the only reason I chose Him is that ultimately He chose me in His praise for His sovereign grace that he extends to sinners like us. Christians, in fact, are to continually thank God that He has elected many others to salvation besides themselves. That is the passage we keep reading in 2 Thessalonians. There, Paul writes, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers, loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved.” So we praise God for our own election and we praise Him for the election of others.

We are to be emboldened to preach the Gospel, expecting results. Let us go back to 1 Thessalonians 1 and answer the question, “How do we know that we are elect?” Or “How do we know that anybody is elect?” Does 1 Thessalonians 1:4 say, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you because we have figured out God’s secret councils.”? That is not what it says. Here is how we know He has chosen us: “Our Gospel came to you, not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.” The only way we know people are chosen is when they believe the Gospel of Christ. That is the only way. Now we know why they ultimately believe the Gospel of Christ and we give God the credit for that as well. We ought to grow in perseverance and service to God.

“So what?” you say. “What difference should it make in my life and ministry?” Look at number 1 on page 27 under “Implications and Applications.”

We are to give all the glory for our salvation to God alone. We are to praise Him for His grace, for His mercy, for His sovereignty, and for His wisdom. We are to thank God that He has chosen other people for salvation. Is that your first thought when you hear about a person you have been praying for? When you hear they believe, do you say, “Thank you, Father, for choosing them.”? We have to confess that we do not. We are not as God-centered as we think we are or as we should be. Now, we may give God the glory for their salvation and that is wonderful. We say, “Thank you, Lord, it is wonderful,” but according to some of these passages, we also ought to thank Him for choosing them. We ought to be awe-struck in contemplation of God choosing us before creation. Do you understand what we are saying? I know what was on God’s mind before the creation of the world, dear fellow believers: us. That is incredible. We were loved by God before time. That is an everlasting love, indeed. God thought of us before He made the world.

We are to exalt in God’s sovereign grace given to us and in His comprehensive plan of salvation. God wants us to have a deep sense of security. He has not decided to keep us in line by threatening to take our salvation away from us. Instead, He has taken a big risk, has he not? He said, “I love you unconditionally. Nothing you can do can ever separate you from my love.” He is taking a risk there. He must have confidence in His grace and Spirit. He also spans His children when we get out of line. But He also assures us of our safety in Christ. We ought to have confidence in God at the same time that we walk humbly before Him. What else can we do? He has chosen us and we are His. Because we are His, He is ours forever.

We ought never to despair—although we do not have to pretend that we are super-spiritual saints who are never depressed, never have problems, never sin, and never have weaknesses. We have all those things and more. But we do not need to despair the way the world does because things are never out from under God’s control. I do not know how to perfectly read His plan. We are not pretending to. But if you ask me what the purpose is of those double predestination passages, I am positive it is not to stifle evangelism. After all, they are given in the book of Romans. The purpose of Romans is to get the Gospel out. Look at Chapter 10 again. What is the purpose of those passages? In the past, I have spoken to you about the purpose of doctrines, the function of Scripture. It is not enough to know what the Bible teaches but we should always ask the question, “Why does it teach what it teaches?”

Ask that question now for retribution. That is a hard one. Well, if the Bible really teaches something, it does it for a reason. And there is a reason for the terrible doctrine of reprobation. Romans 9 and 11 were written to comfort Roman Jewish Christians who feared that God’s promises to Israel had failed. They had not failed. God had done exactly as He purposed. The Roman believers were to bow before God and not question Him. They were to believe that He was working out His will. We are to do the same. What I am trying to say is that when difficult times come, when we evaluate how we feel or when we look around and it looks like the kingdom of God is not advancing, we need to take refuge that God is in control whether it seems that way or not. Ultimately, God is going to win. If people reject Him, oppose Him, and curse Him until the grave, it is a shame they wasted their lives since God is not going to be the loser. God is going to be glorified one way or another. It is a hard saying, indeed, but the reprobation passages are written to persecuted Christians to encourage them that God is on the throne. He is in charge of His universe. The fact that we are not experiencing the results that we would like does not mean that God’s plan has failed. It just means that His ways are not our ways. We are to be confident that everything that God brings into our lives is under His control and for our ultimate good. What else can we do? We are to share God’s love and forgiveness with others. An unloving, unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms and maybe no Christian at all. Such a person has failed to understand grace or

appreciate God's forgiveness. Whatever else is true about us, we are experts in grace. We are experts in mercy. We are experts in forgiveness, because God has shown mercy to us. He has forgiven us for far greater offenses that we have committed against Him or that any human being has done to us. We are experts in those things because we have tasted God's mercy. We have to extend His mercy to others.

Election is part of the foundation of the Christian life. We, in our churches, will not be better off by neglecting any teaching of the Word of God. You might say, "I do not mention election because it is divisive." Well, maybe the way you handle it is divisive, but I think of some words of John Calvin. He addressed that issue in Geneva in the 1500s when he heard people say they did not preach election because they thought it was a matter of speculation and that it divided Christians. Calvin's answer was that we should preach election in a delicate manner—the way Augustine called us to long ago. He said that we should do it carefully, but he also said, "Are we wiser than God, the Holy Spirit, when God opens His holy mouth?" Calvin means that when God speaks in Scripture we have no choice but to receive it, do our best to understand it, and give it out to others. He also said that when God shuts His holy mouth, our inquiry ceases. And, concerning election, God has opened His holy mouth. Since He has opened His holy mouth, we need to teach those things in a way that glorifies God and edifies people. We cannot neglect any portion of God's revealed truth.

I have been asked, "If I am talking with an unbeliever, would I talk about election in the same way that I would in my seminary classes?" No, I would not bring it up. It is not the Gospel. I would answer their honest questions. There are a lot of things I would not bring up. For example, in talking about sin I would talk about their own actual sins. I would not say, "Now, in order to be saved you have to believe that there was literally a Garden of Eden. The Serpent talked, Adam fell, and that got all of us into the mess that we are in now." All of that is true, but that is not part of the Gospel.

On the other hand, if they ask honest questions about anything, I will try to answer them. So, if they ask about election, I would talk about it. The Proverb gives us wisdom when it says, "Answer a fool according to his folly and do not answer a fool according to his folly." There is a time when you do not answer a mocker. If somebody wants to scoff and take the name of Christ and rub it in the dirt, or if he only wants to mock the Lord, then maybe it is better to walk away. It is better to have one fool talking than two. You do not want to get into a fight with that person. That is not good. On the other hand, answer a fool according to his folly. At times, it is good to speak very boldly. Here is something else you should think about. If I am sharing the Gospel with somebody and he starts to read the Bible and say, "What happened in the Garden of Eden?" I am going to tell him the truth. If he says, "Wait a minute, what is this about God choosing people?" I would try to give him the simplest answer I could. I would try not to offend him. But remember, we do not withhold information when people ask honest questions. I would just try to stay simple. I would try to minister to the person according to his or her need. That is what Jesus did.

Obviously God's sovereign election is not incompatible with the responsibility of the people of God. There is mystery here and we must affirm both sides of that mystery. We ought to grow in perseverance. In order to do that we must understand that underneath us are the Everlasting arms. God holds us. We do not hold ourselves. That should not make us lazy. That should make us grateful and that should spur us on to get busy for God.

By the way, it is possible to feel like you are too busy for God. I had a funny Jewish-Christian seminary professor. One day he was preaching in chapel and then he stopped and said, "You know, there are a

dozen people here right now who do not need to hear what I just said. You are already pressing yourself beyond the limits. If you add another 10 things to your list, you are going to have a breakdown.” And then he said, “You 12 sluggers have just turned my channel off. You, put me back on because you need to hear this.” He was pointing to the truth that we often listen selectively. We do not listen for what we need and we do listen to what we do not need. It is also possible that some of us are not doing what we should be doing for the Lord. I doubt that many people in this room, however, are in that situation. May God give us wisdom to know what to do. It is a hard thing to know when to say no, is it not? It is difficult to know what the best thing is. May He give us the wisdom to do the best things. There are not enough hours in the day. The doctrine of evangelism should stimulate us to vigorous service for Christ. It should cause us to expect results in evangelism.

Last, at the top of page 28, we are to be encouraged that God’s plan has a goal that includes us. By God’s sovereign grace we will overcome. We will, one day, be glorified, completely sanctified, and perfectly conformed to the image of Christ, along with all true believers. I do not say that based on my experience or how victorious we have been this week with Jesus. I say that because of the promises of God. Amen.

I have been asked, “In Acts 13, how did the evangelist of the early church view some of these things?” The apostle Paul was not only the great evangelist but also the main teacher of predestination in the Bible. Somehow these things fit together in his mind. His understanding of election did not hinder evangelism. Somehow they went together well.

In Acts 13 we read of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. God is giving them fruit, and as we might have expected, there is opposition. This is in the context of their ministry on this first missionary journey. They are in Pisidia Antioch in verses 13 and following. Acts 13:42-49 says,

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’” When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.

The next verse goes on, of course, and speaks of further opposition. We are most interested in verse 48. The passage plainly says that those appointed for eternal life believed. Nobody stepped in and said that. We have the words and deeds of the apostles and inspired interpretation. Nobody stepped in and said, “All those appointed for eternal life believed.” Paul knew it in his heart. Later on Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, brings this to bear so that we might understand the behind-the-scenes working of God. They were appointed to eternal life long before. In fact, from Ephesians 1 and 2 Timothy 1 we learned that they were appointed before the creation of the world. How did that appointment manifest itself? You know the answer: 1 Thessalonians 1, which says, “Our Gospel came to you in power and conviction in the Holy Spirit. It is the same way here. The apostles turned from the

Jews, who were rejecting the Gospel. Then they preached the Gospel to the Gentiles. Do you think that Paul, in this case, is presented as discriminating among people? Oh no! He throws the seed out. He scatters the seed: “Whosoever will, may come.” All who were appointed for eternal life believed. Election results in saving faith. Said differently, saving faith is the evidence of God’s prior election.

So, we do not need to preach, right? Wrong. Paul needed to preach, but he preached with confidence that the God who called him to Himself in salvation is also the God who calls other people to salvation. Paul’s own experience of salvation was his own model or paradigm for understanding the grace of God. “God save me, the chief of sinners,” he could say. He saves other people too, and he preached with the knowledge that God’s people were out there and that God would bring His people to Himself.

In Acts 13 it underscores the importance of the proclamation of the Word of God. That is, we only learn of this mysterious election bearing fruit in Paul’s ministry, as Paul is active in his ministry. As he preaches that, people respond. It is in that context that Luke gives us the behind-the-scenes action of God so that the people might respond.

In 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul says, “This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.” The comment was made that people from individualistic societies do not always appreciate the Bible’s corporate emphasis. And I have been asked how we understand this first person plural, “us.” Well, it is almost the same in all passages. Paul is writing to churches. The churches are comprised of individuals—by the way, some of whom may not be believers. That is why he says things like 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith.” But the fact is that it is both individual and corporate. It is election of individuals to salvation, and those individuals comprise the Christian church. They are chosen by God to be joined to the Son of God, but as soon as they are joined to the Son of God, they are joined to every other person who has been joined to the Son of God. So it is both individual and corporate. It is not corporate to the denial of it being individual. It is not individual to the denial of it being corporate, either. Usually it is given in the plural because it is a group of believers to whom Paul writes.