

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2018  
Ephesians 1.4-5. God chooses.

Texts Eph. 1.1-5 & Rom. 9.10-21

1. Today we will consider the doctrines of Election and Predestination. These are doctrines which have generated a lot of heat which masked the light. It is not only unbelievers that take offence at these doctrines, but also many Christian's, who at one time or another have kicked against them!

However, they are in the Scripture throughout the Old and the New Testament, and so we must deal with them. In actual fact, we are not meant to deal with them as we might with an unwelcome guest at a wedding. We are not meant to seat these doctrines as far away from us as we can, but rather we are to praise and bless God for them. They are amongst the first items which are listed as the subject of praise, so they are not incidental matters, unwelcome facts, but of prime place and belong at the top table!

The Shorter Catechism questions 20 and 21 is a good starting place. Look them up and see what the Westminster Divines said about Election and Predestination.

There are some preliminary matters that we need to get rid of before we can positively consider the matter in hand. I wonder what your initial reaction is to the concept of Election, the fact that God chooses some, but not all? Often the first reaction is to find fault with God. Whenever we discover ourselves doing this, we should stop and rethink. There is nowhere in Scripture that shows that attempting to correct God's theology or rejecting His word ever goes well! However, the first response of many people who are not Christians as well as some who are, is to say that this is unfair of God. How can God justify choosing some and not all other people to save and bestow mercy on? There are other questions that also arise, but those will also be answered in the same way. They then go on to pose the question of the supposed child in an unknown tribe who has never heard the story or the name of Jesus. Is God fair to them?

The simple and true response to that is that the doctrine of election is not about those who have not heard or cannot hear, it is a doctrine for Christians alone, those who have heard and have believed, and have begun to show the fruits of faith and love in their lives.

God gives instruction elsewhere in the Scripture regarding those who are beyond the reach of the message of the Gospel. There are two solid instructions regarding these people, yet most church people today disregard both! The first is the Great Commission where we are told to go and proclaim, and make disciples and teach them. The second applies to places where the message cannot be taken, even to tribal people who are yet unknown to us, or nations that are closed to Christian mission. We are to pray. There are reports from closed nations of God acting in Sovereign power to arrest people's attention and reveal Jesus to them. This is a bit like Moses at the burning bush, Isaiah's vision, Saul seeing a blinding light, and many other accounts of people meeting God in closed lands.

The many missionary biographies tell us the accounts of people who have gone out to declare Christ. Many have become Christian heroes and household names. A little more searching will reveal many stories and accounts of things God has done through the prayers of believers. There are many stories of God breaking in to a people group where no missionary has been. God is a Sovereign God after all. He made the world out of nothing, and He is able to seek and save the lost.

It is very important that we respond to this doctrine correctly. Some think that God being Sovereign lets us off the hook. In others, it produces a hostility to God, almost a rejection, and both attitudes are not wise and are nothing but our rebellious nature emerging from our corrupt hearts. Why is it we don't like how God acts in the universe He has created? It is our corrupt hearts working! There is a lot of sinful rebellion in all of us! Hebrews 3 verse 12 warns us of this. The root of rebellion is unbelief and pride, beware!

Election and Predestination arises from the Absolute Freedom and Sovereignty of the love of God. When we reach the end of our contemplation of these things, when we cannot balance the equation, we must accept the mystery of God's ways. God has only revealed what He wishes to reveal, there are depths in God which are beyond our finding out. After all, He is the eternal, infinite, boundless One, we are temporal, finite and limited creatures. Paul reaches the impasse of comprehension and puts it to us, will the clay instruct the potter, and how absurd that thought is. See Romans 9.21. However, our fleshly nature still wants to dethrone God and get Him serving us! That will never happen. If you doubt this, read Psalm 2.

Ephesians 1 verse 4 and 5 tells us that election and predestination arose before the beginning of time from the love of God. It is love that is at work in Election and Predestination. This hostility, our not liking the thought that we are not as free as we think, that God works beyond us, arises for two reasons.

Firstly.

Our lack of Knowledge of the Holy One. We think low thoughts of God. We picture Him as an old grandfather pandering to His unruly grandchildren, or we think we care more than He does, and we want to sort out His thinking. There is so little reverent fear of God in the Church today. Tozer mourned in the 40's the loss of the awareness of Majesty in the Christian Church. It has not improved, but rather got worse. Have you ever thought deeply about the Gerhart Ter Steegen hymn 'God reveals His presence?' The first verse is enough to keep us searching the Scripture for years.

'God reveals His presence:  
Let us now adore Him,  
And with awe appear before Him.  
God is in His temple:  
All within keep silent,  
Prostrate lie with deepest reverence.

Him alone  
God we own,  
Him our God and Saviour:  
Praise His Name for ever.'

It's sad that we have lost the sense of punctuation today. Notice the punctuation, this is not really a verse to sing, it is one to read very slowly in sections and to take time to think and look up Scripture to understand what Ter Steegen is sharing with us. Read the account of the dedication of Solomon's Temple, and we will begin to get a glimpse of the sort of encounter with God the hymn writer is describing. These doctrines are meant to take us to our knees and to rise after long thought and worship never to be the same again. I suppose that this sort of thought is far from our minds most times we enter the Church. We are used to coming in and going out with not a lot in-between. This is so sad, we can come to Church looking to encounter God, and very often we do so in the prayer gathering before the service. Why not join us at 10.15 in the vestry.

Secondly.

We react in an inappropriate way to these doctrines because we have an inadequate understanding and realization of sin. We often think that we are not too bad, not as bad as that other person. Have you read the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the temple? This leads us to think that God owes us a living, but nothing could be further from the truth. The thing that we are owed is instant death and eternity in Hell. By the way, hell is not the place where the party is. It's the place where there is no hope, but eternal punishment. The Devil is not the host who will throw us a good time. It is the place where God's wrath is poured out on those who have not believed.

God owes us nothing and we deserve only death and judgment. This is where the amazing love of God comes in. Because God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. God was under no obligation to do this. It was not a thing that His love forced Him to do, but it was out of His love that He freely chose to regard us with grace and to save. Since none of us deserve any of this, it is an absolute astonishing fact that any should be saved. Since this is so, why do we say God is unfair? If only one person in the history of the world were saved, the rest of us would have no ground of complaint.

2. Election and Predestination arise in the timeless eternal, loving heart of God. God had determined what He would do even before the world was made. That is what the Scripture says. Despite humanities sin and rebellion, our hostility and provocation of God, He has determined to save some, we do not know who or how many.

Election is found through the Old and New Testaments. Election is God's act of choosing. Abraham, David, the Prophets, the Hebrew people before others in the first instance. These were all chosen by sovereign grace. Jesus chose the 12 disciples, the Apostle Paul and every true and sincere believer who has or will ever live. 2 Peter also speaks of election and how we should respond to it.

We have actually dealt with Predestination before today, but did not use the word at that time. Predestination is to do with God's over all purposes, to glorify His own Name, to sum up all in Christ, and to make Christians holy. We are often challenged by people who claim that this cannot be because we have free wills.

We do have a freedom of will, but it is bounds set on it, and we often limit ourselves even more by our choices. We do not chose when to be born, who our parents are, the place or time of our birth, and the day we die. If we have a job and are buying a house, we are taking limitations on ourselves, and if children are born to us, then much of our life and time is all but taken out of our hands. We can change their nappies when we want, but the baby will decide if it needs changed again in five seconds – you know what I mean! It is not as easy as we think to set a schedule when children are little.

Think of our perception of freedom in this way. On a flight to Australia, the destination and flight plan is fixed. However we can walk about the plane, sleep, eat or watch movies to our hearts content, but no matter what we do, the plane is still on the route to Australia. So it is with predestination. God has set His plan and direction, and we have some freedom while the journey progresses, but the destination is fixed and unchangeable. God will be glorified, Christ will be all in all, God will have a holy people, and that is fixed.

We do not know who the elect are until the fruit of holiness emerges, the Potter decides. This does not mean that we ignore people and do nothing, we have a duty as Christians and a congregation to tell everyone the gospel. We sow, it is God who gives life, His prerogative. It is at this point our reason cries out that this is not fair! Paul gives an answer in Rom. 9, but then mentions the prerogative of the Potter, we are dealing here with mystery, depths that are beyond our reason and beyond what God has chosen to reveal! When we come to these apparent mysteries, God says believe, trust! This is what the creator says to the clay!

### 3. How do we know if we are elect?

This also has a history of contention, and we need to be careful here.

This is obviously a very important question. It is not because we are a minister or elder, or church member. It is not because we are busy doing kind and good things. All these things may only be works of our own nature. That is not to say that they do not benefit people, but they may not be of benefit to us as regards our salvation. There is a more sure evidence, one that gives assurance of our condition before God.

We all know people who would never dream of going to church or reading the Bible, and yet are much nicer than many Christians. There is even a tendency today to call a good and kind person a Christian, even when they deny it. I have heard people refer to Christian Moslems. I don't think a Moslem would take that kindly. I know what people are hinting at. What they mean is that the person so described is better, kinder and nicer than church goers.

However, we will come to this later in Ephesians, but there is a difference between morality and holiness. A person can do great moral works, live a clean and exemplary life before the world, and yet still have an evil unbelieving heart. The difference between morality and holiness is from whence the acts arise. Is it for personal motives, or is it from a heart which has been made alive by God?

There is a very disturbing teaching of Jesus (Matthew 7.15ff) where He speaks of some who on the Day of Judgment say Lord, Lord, did we not do this in your Name, and that in your Name. Jesus said to them that even though they had done these things, their hearts were not right, they are told to depart from Christ.

Outward acts which arise from a heart devoid of Christ, and not a heart that is being changed by the Spirit are not acceptable to God. They are termed dead works. We get this in 1 Corinthians 13 don't we? Even if I give my body to be burned and have not love (the love of God and the love for God in our hearts) it profits me nothing. Holy works must arise from a holy heart. A muddy stream can only supply muddy water, a bad root will never produce good fruit. Scripture is full of such teaching.

The question is this. Is God in our hearts or not, and if He is, how can we know it?

We had the answer to this in the Matthew passage, 7.20. We know what our condition is because sooner or later, a heart that is occupied by Christ, by the Holy Spirit, will begin to conform to Christ's image and there will be the fruit of the person of Christ and His Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be stamping His nature upon us, and His nature is holiness.

If the Spirit is working holiness in us, and if we are responding to His, 'working and willing in us,' (Phil. 2.12-13), then the inward will give rise to external changes as God's will brings our will into conformity. The changes that will begin to manifest and to which we will give attention are the changes that God works to continue our sanctification. Sanctification is being made holy to live and act to the glory of God.

If God is in our hearts, it will begin to show. Doing stuff is easy, that's why the church is so busy, because it is easier to do than to be. But God looks on the heart. Is love for God and faith in God evident and growing? A heart so affected and indwelt by God will desire to know God more. .Phil.3.10-14. Faber said it well.

For those who love God cannot love Him by measure,  
For their love is but hunger to love Him still better.

A love for God Himself will grow, many of the Psalms speak of this desire. There will be a desire to grow in holiness, to obey God positively, and a determination to forsake all sin. These desires will create in us a delighted desire to take up the Christian disciplines that bring us into personal fellowship with God. The principle ones are reading of Scripture, meditation on it, prayer and longing for others to come to faith, and a desire to meet with other believers regularly. The template of this is found in Acts 2.42, where it tells us the things the first Christians devoted themselves to. These disciples did not

have money, fame, TV, media, or fancy buildings, but they had the presence of the Holy Spirit and each other, Guess what, they turned the world upside down.

Today, we have all sorts of high tech. materials to end all materials. However, do we have the devotion to the things which will make us grow in holiness, do we have the dependence and the conscious awareness of God in their midst that they had? We hear of it in the accounts of revival, but do not give it prime place at other times!

4. Election and Predestination are biblical facts which are revealed to us to give us, and grow hope in our heads and hearts. We are told that God has chosen us in Christ to give comfort, encouragement and life to believers. It is this doctrine that enables us to know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, that none shall pluck us from His hand, and that we will be given infusions of grace to endure to the end. This is a very practical doctrine, and it is included in the list of Spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ, and for which we are to bless God.

If we find ourselves as Christians today, in Christ today, then it is no mistake. God has not had an after-thought, but He has chosen us from before the foundation of the world. This goes out to a place before time was created, so we have no way of even imagining how long God has known us and loved us. Whenever a wife learns that she is expecting, it is normal to dream of the child, to prepare the nursery and even to buy clothes, and the husband buys toys!

If that is what prospective parents do for eight or more months, then think of what God has had time to prepare for us! We are loved from eternity to eternity, and are loved now. So it is well that we that we speak well of God who has spoken well of us, saying that we are chosen, adopted, beloved and desired children upon whom He has placed all His love, even at the cost of His dearly beloved, unbegotten Son. As the hymn says, we are loved with everlasting love, and have been led by grace that love to know.

Meditate on these things. Let us grow up into the grace of God in every way and not be careless and wayward. These doctrines are given to empower us to endure to the end, to run the race, to move us to lay aside all weights and sins that cling so tightly, and eventually to cross the finish line, and gain a crown. These are doctrines which are given to strengthen us with God's might in our inner man, to build a muscular faith, to clear blurred vision, to open out spiritual eyes and ears and to enable us to keep our hearts. It is our failour to attend to these subjects and our failour to assimilate their truths that keep us muddling through our lives, slaves to our feelings and ruled by our circumstances. This is not the hope to which we have been called. We are called to a freedom in Christ, and the joy of ever increasing fellowship with Him.