

Chosen by God, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1

Code: 60-2

INTRODUCTION

First Peter 1:1-2 says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure."

Peter took a theological plunge of profound proportions at the outset of his letter. His subject is the doctrine of election, or being chosen by God.

Election is a controversial subject, so we need to understand it fully. It contains practical implications not only for those who are saved, but also for those who are not.

A. The Dispute over God's Sovereignty

1. Man's revulsion

a) It offends our prideThe gifted Bible teacher and scholar A.W. Pink began a sermon by saying, "I am going to speak tonight on one of the most hated doctrines of the Bible, namely that of God's sovereign election. ... While the truth of eternal punishment is the one most objectionable to nonprofessors, that of God's sovereign election is the truth most loathed and reviled by the majority of those claiming to be believers. Let it be plainly announced that salvation originated not in the will of man, but in the will of God (See John 1:13; Rom. 9:16) that were it not so none would or could be saved--for as the result of the fall man has lost all desire and will unto that which is good (John 5:40; Rom. 3:11)--and that even the elect themselves have to be made willing ... and loud will be the cries of indignation against such teaching (The Doctrines of Election and Justification [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974], p. 12).Pink went on to say that "merit-mongers will not allow the supremacy of the divine will and the impotency ... of the human will, consequently they who are the most bitter in denouncing election by the sovereign pleasure of God, are the warmest in crying up the free will of fallen man" (pp. 12-13). Because he is fallen, man wants to assume some responsibility--even if it's small--for having believed. He desperately wants some credit for having made a right choice.b) It offends our sense of fairnessThe doctrine of election repulses man because at first glance it seems unfair that God would choose to save some, but not others. However, the reason man so desperately wants to have a part in his own salvation is to exercise his pride. The accusation that God is unfair is an expression of fallen human nature.

2. God's justice

a) DefendedGod is never to be measured by any human standard, and certainly not by a standard of fairness that reflects man's fallen nature. As fallen men and women, we do not have a higher standard of fairness than our infinite and eternally holy Creator. Pride is man's real problem.b) Declared(1) Psalm 97:2--"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." Whatever God does proceeds from a base of divine righteousness and justice.(2) Isaiah 55:8-9--"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" As fallen creatures, we are in no position to determine whether God does is just, right, or fair. We step out of bounds when we say that God is unfair.c) DefinedJustice is an essential attribute of God--a part of His very essence. God is infinitely and perfectly just in Himself, of Himself, for Himself, from

Himself, by Himself. God's standard of justice has reference only to Himself and is infinitely higher than that of fallen man. Arthur Pink cited the seventeenth-century Irish church leader James Usher as saying that the source of God's justice is "His own free will and nothing else: for whatsoever He willeth is just, and because He willeth it therefore it is just; not because it is just, therefore He willeth it" (The Doctrines of Election and Justification, p. 53). A thing is just because God wills it. He does not will it because it is just by human standards--He sets the standard. Divine justice is of an entirely different order and character than human justice. d) Delineated But, if justice were the only concern in salvation, God would send everyone to hell. The Creator owes nothing to the creature--not even what He graciously gives to the elect. Can God's election of certain people to be saved be deemed unjust when they don't deserve salvation anyway? Salvation is never a matter of justice; it is always a matter of pure grace. We should not try to determine what's fair and what isn't--God did it, and that makes it just. If we don't understand what God is doing, the issue isn't that He hasn't lived up to our standard, but that our standard doesn't live up to His. God is God, and we are not! Those are humbling concepts, but they are vital if we're to get the right perspective on the matter.

B. The Nature of God's Chosen

First Peter 1:1-2 is the most concise passage of Scripture dealing with the doctrine of election.

Peter's letter begins immediately with theology. Verse one introduces the concept of the "chosen."

Verse two is a brief but profound statement concerning the essence of election.

Peter identifies his readers as those who had been chosen by God. They are identified in two ways: in relation to their place on earth and in heaven. On earth they were "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (v. 1). In heaven they were chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit" (v. 2).

1. Their earthly nature

a) What they were Those to whom Peter wrote were scattered as aliens or strangers in various areas of the Roman Empire. The Greek word translated "scattered" (diasporas) is a familiar word to students of the New Testament. You may have heard of the Greek word diaspora, which means "dispersion." In the gospels it is a technical term for the cultural dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world. It is used that way in John 7:35 and James 1:1. However Peter didn't use it here in a technical way. (1) 1 Peter 1:17--"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth." The emphasis is on the earthly stay of Peter's readers. They were not so much strangers in an alien culture as strangers on the earth itself. (2) 1 Peter 2:11--"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul." The alien or stranger is in an environment antagonistic to his nature. Peter was not addressing Jews who were aliens nationally, but believers who are aliens spiritually. Although a wide audience would certainly include some Christian Jews, they were probably in the minority, since the epistle is addressed to Gentile provinces. Christians are true aliens--strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We don't belong here. The church is a group of strangers scattered throughout the world. In Philippians 3:3 Paul says that the whole church, whether Jew or Gentile, is the circumcision of a spiritual nature. The circumcised Jews at the time Peter wrote were a physically scattered people. First Peter 1:1 indicates that Christians, the spiritually circumcised, are scattered in a spiritual sense. b) Where they were Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were provinces of the Roman Empire occupying what we know today as Turkey. There were a number of churches in those provinces. For example, we know that in the province of Asia there were at least eight churches. Seven of those churches received letters from the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2 and 3. Another church in the province of Asia, the one at Colossae, is not mentioned in Revelation. Peter wrote to a wide audience because of the persecution of Christians. Christians had been falsely blamed for the burning of the city of Rome. The persecution had swept throughout the Roman Empire, and Christians were suffering everywhere. Peter wrote to them all, teaching them how to face suffering triumphantly.

2. Their heavenly nature

a) Peter's phrasing The subject Peter most wanted his readers to understand was that they were chosen by God. In the midst of persecution, when they might question their faith, Peter wanted them to understand that comforting reality. "Aliens ... who are chosen" (v. 1) refers to strangers--those who are dispossessed. It can mean "temporary residents" or "foreigners." Peter's point to his readers was that they belonged to a city "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). Their stay on earth was temporary until they were called to Mount Zion, "the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22). Those aliens were "chosen" (Gk., *eklektos*, which comes from the verb *kale[ma]o*, "to call," and the preposition *ek*, "out"). Peter's readers were "the called out ones"--choice or select aliens.

b) Peter's precedent (1) Deuteronomy 7:6--"You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." God wasn't hoping for some nation to choose Him; He chose Israel out of all the people on the earth. (2) Deuteronomy 14:2--"You are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." (3) Psalm 105:43--The psalmist called Israel "His chosen ones." (4) Psalm 135:4--"The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession." Israel was elected by God.

c) Peter's peers God's manner of election in the Old Testament is also true for the church. God hasn't changed His plan or His method. The Old Testament affirms that no man seeks after God, and that there are none who are righteous (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-4; Rom. 3:10-18). Just as God elected His people by His own free will in the Old Testament, so He elects the church today. (1) Matthew Matthew affirms that the church is elect. Matthew 24:22 says, "Unless those days [of the Great Tribulation] had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect [the chosen] those days shall be cut short." The elect are believers. In verse 24 Matthew writes that "false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." Verse 31 says that "He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet [at the Second Coming] and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." (2) Luke Luke's gospel affirms that the church is elect. Luke 18:7 says, "Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?" (3) Paul Paul affirmed that the church is the elect. (a) Romans 8:33--"Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" (b) Colossians 3:12--"As those who have been chosen [elect] of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion." We've been chosen by God to be holy and beloved. He determined to set His love on us not because of something we did, but strictly of His own free choice. (c) 2 Timothy 2:10--"For this reason I [Paul] endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus."

(d) Titus 1:1--"Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God." (4) John John affirmed that the church is elect. Second John describes the church as "the chosen lady" (v. 1). In 2 John 13 the church is described as "the children of your chosen sister." That's a description of two churches, both consisting of the elect.

d) Peter's purpose When Peter said he was writing to the elect (or chosen) of God, he was referring to believers. Term "elect" is synonymous with "Christian," "saved," and "born again." The rich reality of the terms "elect" or "chosen" is that we are the chosen of God. God made the choice--not us. In essence Peter was saying, "You may not be the choice of the world, but you are the chosen of God." His message was intended to be an encouragement to persecuted believers.

LESSON

An examination of God's election of the church reveals that election contains a number of elements. The first element is the nature of our election.

I. THE NATURE OF GOD'S ELECTION

A. Regarding the Elect

1. What God's choice means

First Peter 1:1 says that Christians are chosen people. First Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Christians are a race chosen for salvation by God.

2. What man's response indicates

However we resist the thought that God chooses us. We'd like to think that salvation depends on us. But that is self-exalting pride. We may think that God's choice appears unfair, but that is also a prideful response. We assume we have a better idea of what is fair than God. The Bible teaches that we are chosen by God, which ultimately requires simple, unquestioning faith in God's justice.

3. What God's Word Says

a) John 15:16--"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you." We do not choose Jesus--He chooses us.b) John 17:9--Jesus prayed, "I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine." Jesus spoke of those whom the Father had chosen and given to Christ.c) Acts 13:46-48--"Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles [from the Jews]. For thus the Lord has commanded us, "I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You should bring salvation to the end of the earth."' And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."d) Romans 9:13-16, 19-22--"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be [Gk., m[ma]e genoito, "No, no, no!"]!" Paul's emphasis is that God's choice is just. He quotes Moses (Ex. 33:19) as proof: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (v. 15). His conclusion: "So then it [salvation] does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (v. 16).

Then Paul said, "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (vv. 19-22). Romans 9:19-22 is Paul's response to fallen man's antagonism toward the doctrine of election. He made it clear that God has just as much right to display destruction and wrath against the ungodly as He does to put His grace, love, and mercy on display for those He elects. Paul's argument is, "Don't argue with God--that only reveals your sinful pride and ignorant, finite mind." Our response to the doctrine of election is to be one of faith in God, who will save whomever He chooses to save.e) Romans 11:4-5--As in the case of the prophet Elijah and seven thousand men who refused to worship Baal, "There has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice."f) 1 Corinthians 1:9--"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son." Salvation is a direct work of God, who called us into fellowship with His Son.g) Ephesians 1:3-5--"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.... He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."h)1 Thessalonians 1:3-4--Paul said, "[I] constantly [bear] in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you."i)2 Thessalonians 2:13--"We should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord,

because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation."j) 2 Timothy 1:8-9--"God ... saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."k) Luke 4:16-30--Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth, and read this from Isaiah 61: "'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.' And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" (vv. 18-22). Up to that point the reaction to Jesus was positive. But notice the change as Jesus continued: "I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian" (vv. 25-27). Jesus was explaining to His Jewish audience the sovereign grace of God. Notice their reaction: "All in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff" (vv. 28-29). The respectable religious leaders of Israel despised the doctrine of election--especially when Jesus pointed out that they were not the elect. They didn't want to hear the truth of sovereign election, and neither do people today. Arthur Pink wrote, "In Rev. 19:6, we are told, 'The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' In heaven and earth He is the Controller and Disposer of all creatures. As the Most High, He ruleth amid the armies of the heavens and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest Thou? He is the Almighty who worketh all things after the council of His own will. He is the Heavenly Potter who takes hold of our fallen humanity like a lump of clay and out of it fashioneth one as a vessel unto honor and another as a vessel unto dishonor. In short, He is the Decider and Determiner of every man's destiny and the Controller of every detail in each individual's life, which is only another way of saying that God is God" (The Doctrine of Election [Venice, Fla.: Chapel Library, n.d.], p. 3).

4. What man's election requires

Pink concluded, "The only reason why anyone believes in Election is because he finds it clearly taught in God's Word. No man, or number of men, ever originated this doctrine. Like the teaching of Eternal Punishment, it conflicts with the dictates of the carnal mind and is repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart. And like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the miraculous birth of our Saviour, the truth of Election must be received with simple, unquestioning faith" (pp. 3-4). The nature of election is that God, by His divine will, selects some for salvation. While this may be hard to understand, it is the plain teaching of Scripture. The doctrine of election is both an exciting and intensely humbling reality.

B. Regarding the Non-Elect

What about the non-elect? Scripture teaches that they are condemned to hell because of their unbelief. Jesus said, "He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18; cf. v. 36). In God's perfect justice, the non-elect are condemned because they do not believe.

CONCLUSION

In revealing the doctrine of election, God is teaching us that He is in control. He is also revealing to us the nature of His grace. The doctrine of election is not meant to confuse us, but to devastate our pride and elicit our praise.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is man's reaction to the doctrine of election? Why (see pp. 1-2)?
2. According to Arthur Pink, what do those who denounce the "election by the sovereign pleasure of God" say about man's will (see p. 2)?
3. What in man explains why he is repulsed by the doctrine of election (see p. 2)?
4. According to whose standard are the righteousness and justice of God to be measured (see pp. 2-3)?
5. What is the source of the standard of divine justice (see p. 3)?
6. If God gave man pure justice, what would happen to us all (see p. 3)?
7. In what two ways did Peter identify his readers (1 Pet. 1:1; see pp. 4-8)?
8. By his use of the term diasporas, in relation to what place was Peter characterizing his readers as strangers (see pp. 4-5)?
9. What is the meaning of the Greek word eklektos (see p. 6)?
10. Where in the Old Testament do we find the concept of election (see pp. 6-7)?
11. Why must the doctrine of election be accepted with simple, unquestioning faith (see p. 9)?
12. Why is it that those who are not elect go to hell (see p. 14)?
13. What does the doctrine of election teach us (see p. 14)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Many reject the doctrine of sovereign election, reasoning that it leads to personal smugness in believers and a cold- hearted attitude of contempt toward the unsaved. Based on what you have learned in this chapter, explain why the doctrine of election should produce just the opposite reaction in the believer--personal humility and reverence toward God, and an urgent desire to reach out to the unsaved. Is that what the doctrine of election is doing in your life?
2. The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins by stating that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. If salvation depended on man's ability to respond to work done by God, man would become an active participant in God's glory. How does the doctrine of election ensure that, in the salvation of any man or woman, only God may be glorified?

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