

Salvation is from the Lord, *pt. 3*

Jon. 2:9c

Although the prophet Jonah sank to great depths in the Mediterranean Sea, and to even greater depths in terms of his own sin, he nonetheless landed on something solid. That something solid was not so much the ‘bars of the earth’ (as he called them) - the base of the rocky ridges at the bottom of the Mediterranean - it was Christ and His salvation. (As Jesus said, ‘Something greater than Jonah is here.’) Having seen his own sin, and the wages of it (which was a fast-approaching death), Jonah, rescued by God’s abounding grace, declared, ‘Salvation is from the Lord.’ On *this* Rock, on *this* profession of faith, as Peter’s experience reminds us, Christ builds His Church (cf. *Matt. 16:18f.*).

We have learned from this confession of Jonah that God is a *sovereign* God. ‘Salvation is *from the Lord.*’ Having *once* created all things by His sovereign *word*, God brings forth a *new* creation by Christ’s sovereign *gospel* (cf. *Jam. 1:18; Eph. 2:10*).

We are also reminded that, salvation being ‘from the Lord’, every person is unable both to save himself and to help himself toward it (being dead in trespasses and sins). If man is to be saved, then it must be God who saves him. Just as if Jonah was to be taken from the Mediterranean, then it must be God who would do it. Jonah could no longer swim against the current. He could not untwine the weeds around him. He could do nothing for, by, or from himself. His spiritual ability had been lost; for sin has more of a *destructive* effect on a person than it does a mere *disabling* effect.

But in the sovereign and abounding grace of God, when sin brought Jonah to the hard, rocky bottom, there was in reality a stronger rock underneath him that is the very basis for his (and our) salvation: *the solid rock of God’s eternal and unconditional choice of Jonah for salvation.* Such is another facet of the salvation that is ‘from the Lord.’

Now, no one who is familiar with the Bible questions whether God elects (or, chooses) sinners for salvation. Such expressions abound throughout the Bible. In Ephesians 1:4, ‘God *chose* us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless in Him.’ Paul also said, ‘we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has *chosen* you from the beginning for salvation’ (2 *Thess.* 2:13). He had earlier greeted them, ‘knowing...His *choice* of you’ (1 *Thess.* 1:4). Jesus said, ‘Many are called but few are *chosen*’ (Matt. 22:14), again, ‘You have not chosen *Me*, but *I* have chosen *you*’ (John 15:16). Peter wrote his letter ‘to those...who are *chosen* according to the foreknowledge of God’ (1 *Pet.* 1:1-2). And there are plenty of other passages¹ which testify to the same: *God chooses which sinners He will save by Jesus Christ.*

But a subject over which there is disagreement among Christians, and what confuses too many of them, regrettably, is how to understand the Bible teaching about this ‘choice’ of God - how it relates to a person in the state of sin, his will, and his faith.

A clear understanding of what God Himself has revealed about these things in Scripture is not only relevant, but *vital* to a confident, thankful, hopeful, heart-felt, and reverent regard for God - the type that will with Jonah say as a fruit of this teaching, ‘Salvation is *from the Lord.*’

And so that we may dispel ignorance and bring this clarity and these good fruits of the doctrine, we begin by noting:

I. *God’s Choice of Sinners Commonly, but Wrongly, Conceived*

¹ Among these (in the NT) are: *Mark* 13:20; *John* 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; *Acts* 13:17; *Rom.* 9:11; 11:5,7,28; *1 Cor.* 2:27-28; *Col.* 3:12; *1 Tim.* 5:21; *2 Tim.* 2:10; *Tit.* 1:1; *Jam.* 2:5; *1 Pet.* 1:1-2; 2:9; 5:13; *2 Pet.* 1:10; *2 John* 1, 13; *Rev.* 17:14. Significant OT passages that speak to eternal and unconditional election are: *Deut.* 4:37; 7:7-8; 10:15; *Psa.* 65:4; 135:2; *Isa.* 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2; 45:4; 49:7; 65:9,15,22. Christ is spoken of as ‘the elect’ at *Matt.* 12:18; *Luke* 9:35; 23:35 (*Isa.* 42:1); cf. *1 Pet.* 2:4,6. At other places, the Bible speaks of God’s spokesmen as ‘chosen’ (*Acts* 1:2,24; 9:15; 10:41) or certain Christians as ‘choice’ people (*Rom.* 16:13; cf. the nuance at *Dan.* 1:5,8,13,15-16; 11:26).

Romans 8:29-30 is a marvelous little bracelet of grace given to the believer. Like little golden links in the bracelet, so are the components of how, as Jonah confessed, ‘Salvation is from the Lord’. Notice the links that comprise this bracelet. There is foreknowledge (v. 29), predestination, calling, justification, and glorification (v. 30). The NT gives other links, or gems, within the bracelet that are connected to these. We’ll not consider all these today. But we do consider ‘foreknowledge’.

The common view of ‘foreknowledge’ is that, from the standpoint of eternity, God looked out on all of fallen humanity and ‘foresaw’ which sinners would believe in Jesus Christ.² There was God in heaven, looking down through the corridors of eternity with His eternal binoculars, looking on all of humanity in its fallen state, and *those whom He saw turning from sin to trust Jesus Christ for salvation, those* He chose to save. And He chose them because of how they exercised their will by faith. God was, by His choosing, in some real sense, then, *responding* to man. That, according to the opinion of many Christians, is what is meant by God’s ‘foreknowledge.’ Before a sinner actually believes in time/history, God, from eternity, saw everyone who would believe in Jesus for salvation; and on the basis of their faith (or the exercise of their will) toward Christ, God responded by choosing them to be saved from their sins by the one they chose as their Savior.³ God, then, chooses faith-exercising, Christ-trusting sinners *on account of* or *in response to* their faith. They first choose Christ, and then God chooses them.⁴ That is what ‘election’ means in the opinion of many Christians. It is a conditional election. God’s choice depended on whether man would first believe in Christ. ‘Foreknowledge,’ then, in *this* view, is synonymous with ‘foresight,’ ‘seeing in advance,’ or ‘knowing something before it happens.’

² Theologians call this the ‘prescient view’ of foreknowledge.

³ To the post-reformation Lutherans, God chose whoever would not resist Christ. To the Arminians, God chose all who would believe in Christ. To the Wesleyans, who go a step further, God chose all who would not only believe, but persevere in faith to the end. Yet all these have in common that God is responsive to the exercise of man’s willful faith in His choice of them unto salvation.

⁴ As Dave Hunt says on behalf of today’s gospel, ‘What God foreknew would be the response of certain persons to the gospel was the *reason* for electing/predestining them’ (Dave Hunt, from *What Love is This?* 226-227; *italics in original*).

Now sure enough, there is an element of truth in this sense of ‘foreknowledge’. God sees and knows everything - even before it happens. And, the Greek word for foreknowledge, from which we get the word ‘prognosis,’ is used that way twice in the Bible. But it is only used this way when *man* is the ‘foreknower’ - how the Jews ‘knew [Paul] before’ his trial (*Acts* 26:5), or Peter’s audience, whom he says ‘already knew’ what he was now writing to them (*2 Pet.* 3:17). It is true that when *man* is the subject, ‘foreknowledge’ (on only two occasions) can carry the sense of ‘know beforehand’ in the sense of mere anticipation or advance understanding.

However, when *God* is the foreknower, it takes on an entirely different meaning (as I’ll explain momentarily). But to clear the way for this, let us see how this common and wrong view of foreknowledge vanishes when we look at the Scripture.

It is refuted *plainly*. ‘Foreknowledge’ as mere ‘foreseeing,’ makes Romans 8:29 say way too much. If God predestined whom He foresaw (and indeed He foresees *everybody*), that would make *everybody* predestined to life, at least if we are to follow the words as they are written. But Christians of this opinion know that is problematic. And so they add a foreign sense to the verse, namely, *that God foresees faith in Christ*. But look at v.29 - Is *anything* said of man’s activity or faith in that verse? Is there *anything* there to the effect that ‘those whom He foreknew *trusting in Christ for salvation* He also predestined?’ There is not. The only point mentioned about God’s foreknowledge are the people foreknown; the people themselves as mere people. ‘Those whom He foreknew He also predestined.’ What God foreknew were *people*, *not actions* of people.

But it is also refuted *structurally*, as to the verse itself (v. 29). Those of this opinion also teach that salvation can be lost or forfeited. This notion says that even those who believe, who are then elected, are not all glorified. But is this what is said in the text? Note vv. 29-30...The one foreknown by God makes it all the way to glory (v. 30)! So, for those who do not continue or finish as true Christians, was God

mistaken that He saw them believing in Christ? We have here an exegetical pickle (which does not taste very good). So, the opinion is refuted on this ground, also.

It is refuted *theologically*. Simply put, if God is totally sovereign, then He cannot base election on any work of man, even his faith in Christ. To do this is in reality to say that God is not totally sovereign. Man first chooses, and God responds to man. That is not a totally sovereign God, but one who bases His decisions on, or defers to, man. We might call it a ‘regal fiction’.

Finally, it is refuted *Scripturally*. Faith is God’s gift. It does not originate in man, but in God. The Bible says, ‘as many as had been *appointed* to eternal life *believed*’ (*Acts* 13:48). I.e., you have to be appointed in order to believe. It’s not in yourself. And anyone whom God saw through the long corridors of eternity believing in Christ, based on this verse, would first have been appointed to do that. That’s why the Bible speaks of ‘those who believed *through grace*’ (*Acts* 18:27). I.e., God graciously enabled them to believe. Furthermore, Jesus clearly preached that election was *before* any act of faith. Listen to this: ‘All that the Father gives Me will come to Me.’ (*John* 6:37). And then v. 44, ‘No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.’ A sinner cannot, of his own initiative, come to Christ. *First* the Father must (in eternity) choose him so as to give him to Christ. *Then* (in history) God draws him. *Then* the sinner comes. Man responds to God, *not* God to man. Again, v. 65, ‘no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.’ God must grant for a sinner to come to Christ. Election, then, is a sort-of green light that makes for faith to be given to a sinner so that he may come to Christ in faith. According to Jesus, election is *before* faith, not based *on* faith. James agreed: ‘God chose the poor of this world *to be rich in faith* and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him’ (*Jam.* 2:5). (See, he agrees with what Paul has said at *Rom.* 8:29).

And so the idea that God chooses sinners because they first choose Christ holds as much water as a sieve. It is a manufactured truth. It is not a doctrine of grace that

can strengthen the heart, because it assumes that the heart is already strong. ‘You did not choose Me’, Jesus said, ‘but I chose you’ (*John 15:16*). Thus far on the ill-conceived version of God’s choice of sinners, a version that we only wish could be called good news.

Now, if this is an ill-conceived notion of election, then what is the truth?

Let’s continue looking at the Scripture, namely:

II. *God’s Choice of Sinners Biblically and Rightly Understood*

The truth of the gospel is that God sovereignly, purposely, and independent of anything in man, chose to save certain sinners over against others. It was not based on a person’s foreseen faith. It was based entirely on God’s will and good pleasure. It is therefore not conditional, but *unconditional*. ‘It *does not depend on him that wills*, or him that runs, *but on God who has mercy*’ (*Rom. 9:16*).

Note Romans 8:29 again. The ‘foreknowledge,’ from which God then predestined those He foreknew, is His Fatherly, intimate, eternal love and favor according to which He preferred some sinners over against the rest. That is the right meaning of ‘foreknowledge.’ It is not merely about God ‘seeing people and what they would do in advance.’ It is God’s eternal, affectionate, and preferential love *as a Father*⁵ toward a particular people who would be His children. *Toward* them He is affectionate; and *in* them He delights. So, He chose them, *not* because of something in *them*, but because of something in *Him* - as the prophet Jeremiah calls it: ‘an everlasting love’ (*Jer. 31:3*). In this way, and in this sense, God ‘knows’ His people. And in that it is from eternity, He ‘foreknows’ His people.

The Scripture makes this abundantly clear in both Testaments. God said about Abraham, ‘I have *known* him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD’ (*Gen. 18:19*). (Why would God bother to say,

‘I have known him’ when He knows everything? The point is God’s preferential love and favor toward Abraham by which He chose him and called him from Ur.) God chose *Abraham*, and not his neighbor.

Again, God toward the Israelites: ‘You only have I *known* among all the families of the earth’ (*Amos* 3:2). Did God *only* know about the Israelites? Surely not. He knew everything about every nation. The point is that His covenant love and favor was set only on Israel, not the Egyptians, nor the Babylonians. He preferred (and chose) Israel over the other nations. As God told Israel through Moses, ‘It was not because of your great number’, but because of His own love (*Deut.* 7:7ff.)

This sense of preferential, intimate love is carried into the New Testament, the writers being largely Jewish and familiar with that sense of ‘knowing.’ So Paul said at 1 Corinthians 8:3, ‘if anyone loves God, he is *known* by Him.’ I.e., a person’s intimate love in preference to God is a response to God’s intimate preferential love to him first (cf. *1 John* 4:19). Paul said, ‘The Lord *knows* those who are His’ (*2 Tim.* 2:19). Does He *not* know who are *not* His?⁶ The idea is that He intimately is bound to them. His covenant love is with them and for them. As our Lord said, ‘I am the good shepherd and I know My own and My own know me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father’ (*John* 10:14-15). Note that – ‘His own’...I ‘know’ them...they ‘know’ Me - even as Jesus and the Father ‘know’ each other...the idea is intimacy, communion, preference, love, and affection.

If ‘foreknow’ means ‘foresee,’ then how can Jesus say to the wicked, ‘I never *knew* you’ (*Matt.* 7:23)? Did He never ‘foresee’ them? Do they surprise Him by being in attendance at the Day of Judgment? Does He have no clue about their creation or existence? No, the point is that He has no *intimacy* or *fellowship* or *commonality* with, or *preference* for them.

⁵ Note that it is always *God the Father* who elects His own, per *Eph.* 1:3-4; *1 Pet.* 1:1-2; etc.

⁶ Cf. *John* 13:18 re Judas and the chosen; also 6:70 (with ‘choose’) and 15:16,19...

Or if, as Peter says, Jesus was ‘*foreknown* before the foundation of the world’ as the Sacrifice for sin (*1 Pet.* 1:20), or as Luke says, ‘was delivered over by the predetermined plan and *foreknowledge* of God’ (*Acts* 2:23), does that mean that God saw down the halls of eternity that Jesus would die on the cross and then said to the effect, ‘Ah, I’ll send Him as the Savior?’ *Absurd!* Reading the ‘foresight sense’ into these verses shows it for the false notion and denial of God’s sovereign grace that it is. And so, as I mentioned earlier, *when God is the Subject and ‘fore-knower’ in a biblical sentence, the term is speaking of His own sovereign choice according to His will.*

And so you should understand Romans 8:29 to mean this: ‘Those on whom God the Father set His intimate favor, His saving love, and His preferential treatment, these He determined to salvation.’ He chose *them*, instead of *others*, for *that* reason – His own love, will, and good pleasure. (And you’ll notice that these persons - the elect - are mentioned *only* as passive recipients. *God* has done *all* the acting in the verbs: He foreknew; He predestined; He called; He justified; He glorified; He conforms to the image of the Firstborn Son.⁷)

So that is God’s choice of a sinner commonly (but wrongly) conceived on the one hand, and the Bible’s teaching of God’s choice of a sinner biblically and rightly understood on the other. ‘Salvation is from the Lord’ - especially in terms of God choosing whom He will save through Christ.

Now of what use is this doctrine to you?

1. In this doctrine of unconditional election, *there is much glory to God.*

God is here glorious in His sovereignty. To think that God not only ordained the elect to salvation, but He also appointed others from the same sinful lump of humanity to a destiny far different (reprobation). He has mercy on whom He will, and He hardens

⁷ And further, the verbs are all aorists, stressing the finality of them specifically, individually, and totality in the order of the divine decree.

whom He will' (*Rom.* 9:18). 'They stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed' (*1 Pet.* 2:8). Or in the words of Jude, 'those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation' (*Jude* 4; see also *Mark* 4:11-12 with *John* 12:37-40). God is not a God who makes His plan to depend on man's actions. (If we consider ourselves rightly, then we will be very glad for this!) And what He has planned is far more solemn than man ever would have devised. We should have a fear and trembling about ourselves before this God.

But God is glorious, also, in His love. Despite what false accusations Dave Hunt and others publish, that God as a loving God is misrepresented and blasphemed by this doctrine, unconditional election actually displays the fullness of God's love all the more! What is glorious about God's love is that He loved us without any conditions attached. He loved us not *because of* who we were, but *in spite of* who we were! Not because of what we did by *faith*, but in spite of what we did by *sin*! There we were in the mind of God, in some way properly 'in *Adam*', and yet in terms of God's foreknowledge, and on account of His gracious choice, 'in *Christ*'. And were it not for that intimate favor of our *Father*, we would know Him only - and evermore - as a *Judge*! God's electing love is as much wondrous love as it is amazing grace!

God is glorious in His pleasure. We despise the person who is consumed with pleasure about himself. We would rather that he love his neighbor as himself. But with God is the highest good. And for Him to find pleasure in Himself is the highest glory, especially since He shares Himself with His neighbors. This very doctrine shows God glorious in His pleasure; for Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well pleasing in Your sight' (*Matt.* 11:25-26). On what basis did God hide His truth and salvation from some? 'This was pleasing in Your sight.' That's why Paul said it was all, 'according to the good pleasure of His will' (*Eph.* 1:4-6).

So there is much glory to God in this doctrine - His sovereignty, love, and pleasure. But:

2. In this doctrine of unconditional election, *there is much application to you.*

You who believe should humble yourself under God. Some regard the doctrine of the Bible the way they do arguments or clogged toilets: they don't care nor dare to get too near. Others look at it like they do taxes – too complex, not interesting. Still others like Brussels sprouts – they don't want to 'take it in.'

But is that the real result of this doctrine? Are you not awed and humbled under the wisdom of God? Is there no sense in you that these decisions, these doings, this doctrine of God testifies to the greatness of God - a God whose thoughts are higher than our own, and therein calls us to worship? Is there no conviction by this doctrine to stand *under* the Scripture that you may *understand* the Scripture? Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

One has said, 'The marvel of marvels is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected *all* this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected *any*.' What privilege we have under a choosing God. Do you think this way? Do you find fault with God for choosing some and not others? Then why do you not find fault with His choice of you? *Before you gripe and whine that God did not choose everybody, nor will save everybody, stop yourself, and stand in awe that God has even chosen some - and of all people, you and me.*

'Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?'

Even you who may have faith being created in your hearts now, *you're stimulated to come to Christ*, and as is true for those who have already professed faith, 'Be all the more diligent to *make certain about His calling and choosing you*' (2 Pet. 1:10). Does God's sovereign choice of sinners curtail a genuine offer of the gospel to everybody? *Indeed,*

it is the basis for it. God has chosen sinners to save them! So who will He call, and who will He save today? *You?* If you would be saved, then come; for the God who has *chosen particular sinners* is the God who *offers salvation to them freely!* Find no fault, and lay no blame at God who offers. If you believe that God here has a speck in His eye, then first take the log out of your own by repentance and faith. And frankly, you will then see that it is not a *speck* in His eye after all, but a *sparkle* - a sparkle of Fatherly love.

‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved’. And as you enter the kingdom of heaven by repentance and faith, as you turn to consider its gates, you will see these words on the other side saying of you, ‘Chosen from before the foundation of the world.’ So friend, come, and be diligent to make certain God’s calling and choosing you.

And to those of you who have entered the small gate, and are journeying on the narrow way. Have you grown lethargic? Lukewarm? Cold? Have you become careless in ‘working out your salvation with fear and trembling?’ (*Phil. 2:13*) Have you come to presume that, because you don’t sin as bad as you once did, or are now about religious things more, that *this* is a ground of safety and confidence before God? May it never be! And if it is for you, then ‘Be diligent to make sure of His calling and choosing you.’ Be about good works. Bring forth good fruits. Love the brethren. Obey the Lord. For ‘as you practice these things, you will never stumble’ and the entrance into the eternal kingdom will be abundantly supplied to you’ (*2 Pet. 1:10-11*). Let us see, then, the Bible’s teaching on election as not only a comfort to believers, but also a stimulus to live by it.

Believers should be stimulated, also, to praise the God of their salvation. Where were you when Christ chose you? Non-existent. You were nothing. And what were you like when God contemplated you? Wretched man that you were! And what did God require of you that His love and favor be placed on you? Absolutely nothing. You had nothing to offer! And yet now, by the electing grace of God, you have every spiritual

blessing in Christ. What could have been forever hidden from you – Christ Himself – is now manifest in glorious splendor. Will you praise God? How can you not?

Again, ‘I praise You, Father, for you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent, and have revealed them to infants’ (*Matt.* 11:25-26). Praise is a fruit of the doctrine, according to Jesus. Let us take our cue from Him; let us give God praise through Him.

Believers should be stimulated to greater confidence in Christ. Let me guess, there are times when you fall into sin. You commit sins you thought were finally gone. Perhaps new sins of a different sort have come. Perhaps some sins have remained, hardly decreasing since your conversion. Let me guess again, your heart is filled with pain about all sorts of things. And your confidence in Christ wanes.

But let the words of John Flavel settle in your hearts like an anchor in the sea. He said, ‘As God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not forsake you because you are low.’ Election implies that God will always – no matter what – sustain His people before Him in Christ.

You can never, ever, ever get lower than when you were when God elected you! And if grace has *raised* you, grace will *keep* you. If sin has lowered you, grace will lift you. If doubt now plagues you, confidence will grip you. If the devil accuses you, the Spirit will comfort you. Remember that the Father who has chosen you is Jesus’ Father. And if He has raised Him from the dead, will He not forever keep you in His care?

With this doctrine of election, God not only gives His children bread, but butter and jam also; not only sunshine, but gentle breezes. Notice how God wants you to be comforted and strengthened through this teaching:

Rom. 8:28-30...if we are foreknown, then we will be conformed to Christ's image.

Rom. 8:31...if we are foreknown, then we have courage in God before men.

Rom. 8:33-34...if we are foreknown, then our justification is as real today as when converted.

Rom. 8:35-39...if we were foreknown *in* eternity, then we shall be loved *toward* and *into* eternity.

So then, let everyone who hears these words see that by this doctrine, God is interested in sinners to choose them that He might save them. And as this is so, let today be the day that you come to Him. And let every believer be stimulated to greater confidence in Christ by this doctrine, enlivened to a more ready worship of God, and humbled before Him.

Dear friend, God saved Jonah by the death and resurrection of the Christ he portrayed, and worked all things for good even at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. And what God did for Jonah *then*, He does for sinners *today*: 'Salvation is from the Lord.' Let us find in God's purpose of election that this, in Christ, is a true and solid rock on which to stand.

Preached at Messiah's Church (RPCNA)

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