

Congregation,

Christians don't disagree that election is in the Bible and that we must believe it. We may not like it but it's in the Bible and we have to deal with it. But, boy, do we disagree over how it happens.

Some Christians who think differently about it than us reformed church folk, charge that our view is unbiblical. Our theology is based on human writing by John Calvin, the Westminster Confession, and other documents but not on the Bible. They say our view opposes evangelism. God decides so there is nothing for us to do. It's all predetermined. In fact, they argue that our theology says we are predetermined to sin, so God is responsible for sin, not me.

People can say whatever they want but what does the Bible say about election? Well, the most detailed instruction is what we read in Romans 9. And we'll get there but, as we dig into Romans 9, we cannot forget that **Romans 8** is right before ch. 9.

We've just spent 4 weeks on Romans 8. It gives us the comfort and confidence we want, need and love:

- a. No condemnation: God fully forgives our sins through Christ.
- b. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- c. Present strength from God and future glory coming.
- d. The promise that God watches over us
- e. And Jesus has us securely in his hands
 - i. For our body and soul.
 - ii. For now and eternity.

These great truths bring great comfort from a great, powerful and loving God who clearly has us in his hands and all things under in his control.

ELECTION IN CONTEXT OF GOD'S LOVE

I believe people go wrong in understanding the doctrine of election when they try to separate it from God's love. Romans 8 includes the passage about the foreknowledge of God. We must understand that foreknowledge is a word for love. When Adam "knew" Eve, it meant he loved her and was intimate with her. Similarly, throughout the Bible knowing is loving. When God foreknows us, it's talking about how he loves us beforehand —before **we** love him. Here these words afresh from Romans 8:

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined,

he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Similarly, in Ephesians 1:4, we learn that God chose us BEFORE the foundation of the world. That begs the question, is his choice based on his knowledge that we would choose him? Is our choice for him a condition for him to choose us? No.

Listen:

*Eph 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will.***

And again in v.11:

Eph 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

Now listen to these verses from Romans 9. Paul writes,

--In the first 5 verses, to remind us of all the gifts that God gave Israel that pointed them to the coming Christ.

--In v.6 he says, but not all who are descended from Israel are Israel

Meaning that election is not limited by our race, tribe or tongue.

God has the love of the whole world in view from the very beginning.

--In v.13 Paul says God loved Jacob and hated Esau before either one was born.

This illustrates that election is God's choice and not based on any sort of foreknowledge that we might choose him or not. That's hard to understand but Paul's clarifies this point in the next verses when he says,

--In v.14-16 salvation depends on God's mercy alone, not man's effort because in our own effort and sinful desires we will never choose God. We will harden our hearts to him, just as Pharaoh did even though God gave him 10 chances to repent.

Paul drives that point home when

--In v.21 he reminds us that God is the Potter and we are the clay. And it's the Potter's business what he makes with the clay. But again, if we view God as some ogre wanting to make things for the joy of smashing them, then we might see election as a horrible doctrine. But God purposefully and even redemptively forms us as a potter forming clay—because he's always seeking to redeem. So he purposefully and redemptively shapes his children to image Christ more and more. His shaping comes from a place of love.

--In v.22 and following, we should read those slowly several times. Listen closely to what Paul is saying. It's about God opening the door of salvation wider so that Gentiles are welcomed. Those who are not his people become his people. Those called "not loved" are now called "my loved one."

I don't claim to understand it all perfectly but it seems pretty clear that God's love in Christ is the basis of election. And if we try to view election apart from love, we get misguided.

Paul is not the only one who teaches election. We hear Jesus speak about election saying things like: “All those the Father has given to me, come to me...” His love draws us in. More specifically he says in John 6:37-39,
Jn 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away....³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me....

Friends, there are a lot of mysteries surrounding the doctrine of election. But if we take Romans 9 in light of the comfort we all love, want and cling to in Romans 8, and if we hear the tone of love in Jesus’ words and Paul’s teaching, then we are on the right path.

Election is first of all about comfort because it is all about our loving God drawing us to himself.

ELECTION ALLOWS US TO GIVE UP CONTROL

The second thing that the doctrine of election teaches us is giving up control.

The arguments over election really stem from whether we believe salvation is one-handed or two-handed. Here’s what I mean by that.

- ii. In the two handed view of salvation and election: We reach up to God and then He reaches down to us. He chooses us because we choose him.
- iii. In a one-handed view, God reaches out to us. He comes and saves us completely. God **does it all** because that’s the only way we’d get saved.

If we properly understand the sinfulness of mankind, if we acknowledge that we are dead in our sins as Paul says in the early part of Romans, then how are supposed to choose God? How can election be two-handed? The Biblical truth is that **if** we have a choice in salvation, we will always and only make the wrong choice. We don’t want God by nature. Our free will post-fall is only to turn from God. Paul drives that home in the very last verse of our reading where he quotes Isaiah. V.29:

*²⁹...“Unless the Lord Almighty
had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.”*

We all remember what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Paul’s point is that if God doesn’t intervene to rescue us, we’ll perish.

One-handed election is what the Bible teaches. I don’t know if you have ever seen some of those videos of amazing saves by fathers or mothers. The most amazing one I saw recently was two little kids about 2 and 3 years old playing on the front yard not far from their dad. They are just pushing each other and laughing together. But Dad hears a noise, looks up and jumps toward the children. He grabs them both at once and rolls backwards with them in his arms as a car comes barreling through their fence and stops right where the kids were playing. The car

comes at a high speed and misses the father by mere inches as he rolls out of the way with his children tucked into his arms. They are saved from certain death by the actions of their loving father.

This is the action of love. And that's how we rightly see election. We must be filled with gratitude to God for his saving actions on our behalf. We have been rescued from our own sin and the death it brings about. Rescued by his loving work, made possible through Jesus paying for our sins.

Our comfort is greater and absolutely certain only when salvation rests in God alone. And that's the point Paul is making here in Romans 9 about election. Jews and Gentiles alike depend on our salvation from God alone.

If you believe this one-handed view of salvation, then I believe we also have greater freedom to enjoy the gift of salvation.

What Paul wants is for us to live fully in the assurance that God has us. I want you to leave this morning with comfort and with a renewed desire to live out of the comfort of God's electing love. Rather than trying to figure out mysteries that are only God's to answer and mysteries which I'm certain won't matter at the end of time, let us focus on living out of the certainty of our election. Let us learn to live more and more in sync with Jesus in gratitude for his saving work in rescuing us.

To that end, I brought my newest toy to church. Patsy and I enjoy biking together. So a couple weeks ago, I saw this used Tandem bike for sale and I grabbed it. I knew she wouldn't be crazy about it because she has told me several times before that she doesn't like the idea of sitting on the back and not being in control. She thinks I'm a little too reckless. She's probably right. But I took a chance and bought the bike anyway because I was hoping that we'd both learn to enjoy it. And if you ever want to borrow it, just ask!

This bike reminds me of this great story I heard several years ago about biking with Jesus. It reminds me of the comfort that comes from one-handed salvation. Just as we depend on Jesus entirely for our salvation, we must learn to trust him entirely throughout life. So when it comes to a tandem bike, the question is "who is on the front, at the controls?"

(Move to the bike. Front seat.)

In a story called "The Road of Life", we read,

When I first met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike. And I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal but our relationship was not yet what it should have been. I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was rather boring, but predictable. It was the shortest distance between two points. But when He took the lead, He knew delightful long cuts, up mountains, and through rocky places at breakneck speeds. It was all I could do to hang on!

Even though it looked like madness, He said, "Pedal!" I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure, and when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I gained love, peace, acceptance and joy; gifts to take on my journey, My Lord's and mine.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but He knows bike secrets. He knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners. He knows how to jump to clear high rocks. He knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. Now I am learning to keep my mouth shut and pedal in the strangest places. And I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do it anymore, He just smiles and says... "Pedal."

This is really the comfort of election. It's best one-handed, or with Jesus taking the front seat of the tandem as we go through life.

9 I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it **through** the Holy Spirit— ² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

⁶ It is not as though God's word had failed. For **not** all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ⁸ In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the **children of the promise** who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ⁹ For **this** was how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and **Sarah** will have a son."

¹⁰ Not only that, but Rebekah's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. ¹¹ Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The **older** will serve the younger." ¹³ Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

¹⁵ For he says to Moses,

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

¹⁷ For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" ²¹ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

²² What if God, **although** choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As he says in Hosea:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;
and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one,"

²⁶ and,

“In the very place where it was said to them,
‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘children of the living God.’”

²⁷ Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea,
only the remnant will be saved.

²⁸ For the Lord will carry out
his sentence on earth with speed and finality.”

²⁹ It is just as Isaiah said previously:

“Unless the Lord Almighty
had left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
we would have been like Gomorrah.”