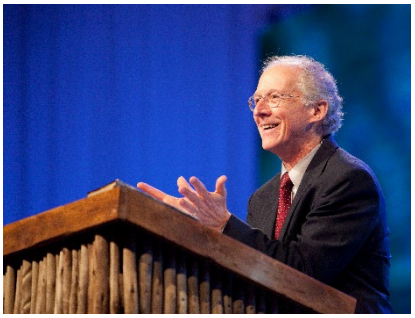
The Doctrine of Election

Unconditional Election and the Invincible Purpose of God

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Scripture: Romans 9:6–13 ***Topic: Predestination***



Our purpose today is limited and huge. We focus merely on Romans 9:11–12:

> Though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."

Our aim is simply to understand and apply to our lives the reason Paul gives for saying to Rebekah, before Jacob and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad, "The older will serve the younger."

Why did God do this? The answer is given part way into verse 11: "so that God's purpose according to his choice would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls." That's the reason for announcing Jacob's election before his birth. "So that God's purpose according to election would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls." That's what we want to understand.

I exhort you to feel the weight of this sentence. When God tells us why he does something as eternally fundamental as unconditional election, he is giving us information about the nature of ultimate reality — namely his reality — that is more foundational and more important than all other human knowledge. Nothing is greater to know under God than why he does his most fundamental acts. And here is one of these massively important sentences. Why, God, do you do this great work of unconditional election? Answer: "So that my purpose according to election would stand, not because of works but because of me who calls."

My outline would look like this: First, we will look at the phrase "God's purpose according to election" and see what that phrase means. Second, we will look at the phrase

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"not because of works" and see what that adds to God's purpose. Third, we will look at the phrase, "But because of him who calls."

God's Purpose According to Election

First, then, what does the phrase "God's purpose according to election" mean? Literally the construction in the original is "the according to election purpose." "According to election" is defining the purpose. What purpose? "The according to election purpose." In Romans 11:21 the same grammatical construction occurs in the phrase, "the according to nature branches." All English versions translate it "the natural branches." They turn "according to nature" into an adjective. That's good English and gets the meaning right. So here in Romans 9:11 we could do it like this: "The according to election purpose" would be "the electing purpose."

In other words, the purpose of God is at least partly defined by election. The purpose of God that would not be what it is, if there were no election. The purpose that consists largely in election. But what is it? How can we state God's purpose according to election — God's electing purpose? Let's look at the three closest parallels in Paul's writing where he used this word "purpose," and work our way back to verse 11.

Look first at Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." Here he says that God calls people to himself but there is something behind that call, namely, God's purpose, guiding whom and how he calls. We are called "according to his purpose." So God's purpose has to do with guiding his saving work, in this case his calling.

Next, let's look at 2 Timothy 1:9. Here again, he connects God's calling his people to his purpose. "He 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." Here we see four things:

"Christ is not an afterthought. God's purpose was in him and through him from all eternity."

- *First*, God's purpose is eternal — "from all eternity," he says. It doesn't originate or respond to anything. It is eternal.

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- *Second*, God's purpose is related to Christ from all eternity. Christ is not an afterthought. God's purpose was in him and through him from all eternity.

- *Third*, God's purpose is linked with grace. "According to his own purpose and grace." It is a gracious purpose. It's a purpose to exercise grace.

- *Fourth*, the purpose of God rules out works as the basis of his saving call: "He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose." His own purpose is the basis of his call, not our works.

The third parallel is in Ephesians 1, first in verse 11 and then verses 4–6. Ephesians 1:11 says, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will." Notice two things:

- *First*, not just our calling but also our predestination is "according to his purpose." So God's purpose governs his predestination.

- *Second*, Paul says that it is a free and sovereign purpose, not governed by anything outside of God.

He says, "According to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will." What's the point of saying that this Purposer "works all things after the counsel of his will"? The point is that he governs all things, and that he does not base his governance ultimately on anything in man or in nature, but only on himself. "He works all things after the counsel of his will." We are not finally decisive in turning the will of God; God alone is decisive.

The next verse (12) comes very close to defining God's purpose. It's a continuation of verse 11 and tell us what the purpose is of him who works all things after the counsel of his will, namely, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of his glory." In other words, he does all his works to this end: that we would "be to the praise of his glory." His purpose here is the praise of his glory. It is even more pointed in Ephesians 1:4–6. Follow the purpose statements up to their highest point in verse 6:

> Just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of his will [probably another way of referring to his purpose], to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

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There it is again. God's purpose is to bring about the praise of the glory of his grace. All election, all predestination, all calling, and all redemption is according to this purpose — for the praise of the glory of his grace.

WHAT IS GOD'S PURPOSE?

Now back to Romans 9:11. God performs the unconditional election of Jacob over Esau "so that his purpose according to election would stand." From all we have seen so far, as well as the context of this paragraph, I would state the purpose like this: God's purpose is to be known and enjoyed and praised (or if you like alliteration: to be seen and savored and sung) as infinitely glorious in his free and sovereign grace. This is the purpose that governs all the works of God. He elects, predestines, calls, redeems, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies to this end — for this purpose: to be seen and savored and sung as infinitely glorious in his free and sovereign grace.

- By *infinitely glorious* I mean perfectly beautiful and immeasurably great.
- By *free* I mean the final reason for all events in the universe is in himself and not another. The decisive influence of all that happens in the world is God's. He works all things, not just some things, after the counsel of his own will. He alone in all the universe has the freedom of ultimate self-determination.
- By *sovereign* I mean that nothing can thwart what he wants most to do.

"God's purpose is to be known and enjoyed and praised as infinitely glorious."

God's purpose is to be known and enjoyed and praised as infinitely glorious in his free and sovereign grace. And this purpose is *according to election* — it is an electing purpose — because if God did not elect unconditionally he would not be free, he would not be sovereign, and he would not be glorious.

- *Not free*, because then men would determine their own election, not God. He would be bound (not free) to conform to their own self-determination.
- *Not sovereign*, because instead of doing successfully what he wants most, he would be thwarted again and again by self-determining man.
- *Not glorious*, because God's absolute freedom and sovereignty are the essence of the glory of his grace.

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Not Because of Works

To show that last point, Paul makes a negation and an affirmation at the end of verse 11: "so that God's purpose according to election would stand, not because of works but because of him who calls."

Let's take the negation first. God chose Jacob over Esau "not because of works." This adds something important to the first part of verse 11 where Paul says, "though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad." Those words stress that God chose Jacob before birth and before virtue or vice. But now Paul goes farther and says that this choice was not "on the basis of works." Here the time is not the point. The foundation is the point. God did not choose Jacob because of works he had already done. Nor did he choose him because of works that he would do later.

In other words, here Paul is ruling out foreseen good deeds that Jacob will do, and foreseen evil deeds that Esau will do. And he is saying: my election is not based on deeds in any way — not deeds already done, not deeds undone and foreknown, and not deeds undone and not foreknown. My election is free. That is my glory. Therefore, my purpose accords with that kind of election, because my purpose is to be known and enjoyed and praised as infinitely glorious in my free and sovereign grace.

Finally, consider the affirmation at the end of verse 11. Why does Paul say, "so that God's purpose according to election would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls"? This is striking. Paul's ordinary contrast with works is faith. In 9:32 he says, "Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works." In 3:28 he says, "A man is justified by faith apart from works." In Galatians 2:16 he says, "A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith." When we hear Paul say, "Not by works" we naturally expect him to also say, "but by faith."

But Because of Him Who Calls

But that is not what he says here. He says, "not because of works but because of him who calls." Why? Because faith is a condition of justification, but it is not a condition of election. Election is unconditional. But justification is conditional. Before we can be justified we must believe on Jesus Christ. But before we can believe on Jesus Christ we must be chosen and called. God does not choose us because we will believe. He chooses us so that we will believe.

Notice carefully how Paul says it. "God's purpose according to election will stand . . . because of him who calls." Notice it does not say: his purpose stands because of his

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calling. It says because of *him* who calls. God will one day call his elect. But his election is not based on that calling. It is based on himself and his free and sovereign will to call.

> ***"For God to be God he must be free and sovereign."***

So to paraphrase the verse: "God's electing purpose will stand not because of any foreseen deeds, and not because of any foreseen faith; but simply because of him — because of God." The ultimate ground of God's election is God. This is simply another way of saying: for God to be God he must be free and sovereign. This is his glory. This is what it means to be God.

The Application to Our Lives

There is more to see. So much more to see. But for now, the application to our lives is clear. If the purpose of God — flowing from the very essence of what it means to be God — is that he be known and enjoyed and praised as infinitely glorious in his free and sovereign grace, then the meaning of our existence is clear. We exist to know and enjoy and praise and display the glory of God's free and sovereign grace. We exist to see and savor and sing — and spread a passion for — the glory of God's grace.

And underneath this meaning for our lives is the massive assurance: This purpose will stand. And all who are in Christ by faith will stand in it. So spend yourself for this great purpose while you live. All the elect in Christ prevail, God's purpose stands, it cannot fail.

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