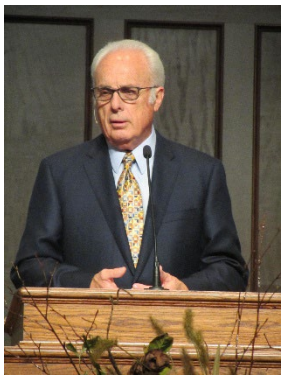
The Doctrine of Election

Who Chose Whom?

JOHN MACARTHUR



What a privilege and honor it is this morning to address you again from the Word of God on such a marvelous theme as the doctrine of election. Churches today are struggling through a severe identity crises – many churches, many church leaders and pastors trying to figure out what style to follow, what mode to follow. Trendy new options compete with ancient ones to capture the commitment of churches and leaders and believers. And there is in the midst of this a sad and, I think, needless confusion with regard to the character of the church, usually based on some notion that somehow culture creates the church, culture informs ministry, style produces spirituality, things like that. As we think about settling the matter of the churches identity, I really believe we have to go back to the heart of that identity, which is bound up in the eternal decree of God with regard to the church, namely the doctrine of election. This doctrine is at one and the same time essential to understanding the church and largely resented by the church, and therein lies part of the problem. I don't think it's wrong to assume that most people who call themselves believers do not accept the doctrine of sovereign election, and this fact alone skews severely their ecclesiology. So what we're talking about here is not something esoteric, but what we're talking about in this discussion is something completely endemic to the character and nature of the church, which informs how we do ministry.

The pervasive notion of skeptics and enemies of this doctrine is that the doctrine of election is unfair, and we've all heard that. But that of course is when you measure it by some feeble, fallen, human judgment. God is not to be measured by any human standard. Psalm 50 verse 21 says, "You thought that I was altogether like you." What a foolish idea that is. We remember the words of the Apostle Paul who said, "Oh the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God," and went on to say, "His ways are past finding out." When we talk about fairness in the matter of the doctrine of election, we immediately have to set aside all human considerations and talk about the nature of God and what is divine justice. And simply stated, it is an essential attribute of God whereby He infinitely and perfectly, just in Himself, of Himself, for Himself, from Himself, by Himself and none other, does what He wants.

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As William Perkins said many years ago, "We must not think that God does a thing because it's good and right, but rather is the thing good and right because God wills it and works it." God defines for us what is justice, because God is by nature just and righteous, and what He does reflects that nature. His own free will and nothing else is behind His justice, so whatever He wills is just, and it is just because He wills it, not because it is just and therefore He wills it. Now as we think about the justice of God being representative of His character and not subject to fallen assumptions, we begin to understand that God in the nature of His own sovereignty defines everything that He does as not only just but perfect. The Creator owes nothing to the creature, not even what He is graciously pleased to give. And so God does exactly what God chooses to do. That is what it means to be God.

We could talk a little bit about the idea, of course, that salvation is not a matter of justice, and aren't we glad for that. But it is in a sense, because Jesus Christ had to pay the just price for sin in order that grace might be extended to us. But salvation of course is, for all of us who are fallen sinners, deserving of nothing but eternal damnation, really a matter not of justice but of mercy and grace, which requires justice, but comes to us in the form of mercy and pure grace.

Setting aside that discussion for the moment, simply referring to it because it is commonly brought up, I want to do some things this morning that I hope will make this doctrine real to you and powerful in your life. First of all, I just want to touch lightly on the doctrine itself as it is laid out in Scripture, and then I want to define it more deeply as to its nature, in a way that I think has tremendous impact for us. The idea that God does what He wants, and that what He does is true and right because He does it, is behind of course the understanding of everything in the Scripture, and certainly it is behind the doctrine of election. But we cannot isolate the doctrine of election from – election of the church in regard to us – from every other thing that God chooses to do. Because in the whole, large picture, God elects everything that He does. Everything that God does, He does because He chooses to do it, and His choices are free from any influence outside Himself. So the doctrine of election fits into this broader comprehension of a sovereign God, by His own nature, doing whatever He chooses to do. That is the broadest perspective. When you open the pages of the Bible you see that repeatedly. In the very act of creation, God creates exactly what He wants to create in exactly the way He wants to create it, allowing for the very things that occurred in human history, in order that He might accomplish the redemptive plan, which He had previously designed. Everything fits into the unfolding purpose of God.

He chose in the Old Testament, as you know, a nation, Israel. He chose Israel, and not because they were better than any other people or because they were more desirable than

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any other people, but because He chose them. That's why. Nothing more. As Richard Wolff said, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." But it may not have rhymed as well, but if He had chosen anybody else, we would have had the same dilemma. God chooses whoever He chooses. In fact, in Psalm 105 verse 43, He calls Israel His chosen ones. In Psalm 135:4 it says, "The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself." In Deuteronomy 7 and Deuteronomy 14 – you remember these words – "The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth." This is nothing new. Christ is called Christ – mine elect. The angels are elect angels. God has chosen from the very beginning everything that fits into the unfolding purposes, the uninfluenced purposes of His own sovereignty.

When you come to the New Testament then, you are not surprised, that when His own elect Redeemer arrives into this world and begins to carve out the unfolding plan of redemption that the New Testament outlines and the marvelous reality of the Church, we shouldn't be at all surprised that this is an elect body, because that is consistent with the way that God has always operated. And so throughout the New Testament you have references to the church as the elect, repeatedly through the New Testament. Chosen by God, the elect of God. Christians, of course, from the very outset certainly have to understand this. John 15:16, Jesus, looking at His disciple, says, "You have not" – what? – "chosen Me. I have chosen you." And that's the way it has always been.

In Acts chapter 13 and verse 48, it says, "As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." And of course you can go into the ninth chapter of Romans and spend a lot of time going through that monumental passage, on the elective purposes of God as manifested in the choices of Jacob and Esau. Right? And how God, not on the basis of anything they had done, but according to His own free and uninfluenced sovereign purpose, chose whom He chose. And have we any right to say to the potter, "You can't make the pot the way you want to make it?" We'd better put our hands over our mouths and be silent to question God's sovereign purposes. We read in the epistles the expression of election in terms of a call. And after the study that I have made through the years of the New Testament, I think it is accurate to say – and I think John Murray has a section, if I remember on this, in one of his books – every reference to the call, to a calling in the epistles of the New Testament, is in fact an effectual call of the elect to salvation. The church then is called the elect.

In Ephesians chapter 1, we were predestined in Him by His love, before the foundation of the world, that we might be brought to faith in Christ. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul reminds the Thessalonian brethren, "Beloved of God, we know your election." And I'm just giving you a little bit of a list of the passages. They're all through the Scripture, references to this elective purpose. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, "We should always give thanks to God for you,

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brethren beloved of God, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." Now I don't know how you can say it any more clearly than that. God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation. Still – and we have just touched on a few Scriptures – as clear as those Scriptures are, people have difficulty with the doctrine of election. I heard of a prominent preacher recently who said that, "Calvinism, and in the main, the doctrine of sovereign election and what flows out of it, is the single greatest danger to the church today." Now if you believe that, you have a warped view of the church, to say nothing of missing the point on election. That has tremendous implications for how you do ministry. If you don't believe that God is the Sovereign One who is determining who is being saved, then you must believe it's your job. I'd be out of the ministry if I was an Arminian. I don't want that responsibility.

In Luke chapter 4 verse 17, an interesting little incident occurred with tremendous impact. Jesus is speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth. He was handed the book to the place where it was to be regularly read from Isaiah, and in verse 18 of Luke 4 it says, "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." In other words He said, I have come to preach the gospel. "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.'" In other words, the One the prophets said would come to preach has come. "And all" – listen to this – "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?'" They knew Joseph. They didn't know anything about Joseph that could cause his son to be so special, as they were noting this man to be.

And then He did this, He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself. Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.'" Now that you have identified me as a very special person and you are all speaking well, you're going to want me to do some miracles here. You're going to want me to demonstrate my supernatural power. And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in His own home town." And then He says this, "But 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."

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What kind of an answer is that? What's He saying to them? God hasn't determined for Me to heal everybody. God will decide what widow gets healed, and God will decide what leper gets healed. It's not up to you. It's up to Him. You may expect me to do in your town what was done in Capernaum. God doesn't work that way. God picks and chooses what He wants to do. And then, verse 28 says, and here is the first New Testament reaction to the doctrine of election, "And all in the synagogue were filled with" – what? – "rage."

Well, little has changed in some places. I suppose the so-far-so-good down through verse 19, the real question was, would they tolerate sovereign grace? Would they tolerate God's selectivity? Respectable worshipers of the synagogue even hated this truth. In Revelation 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 rules amid the armies of the heavens and none can stay His hand or say to Him, "What doest Thou?" He is the Almighty who works all things after the council of His will. He is the heavenly potter who takes hold of fallen humanity, and in His hands makes a lump of clay into something that becomes a vessel unto honor and another is a vessel unto dishonor. In short, He is the decider and the determiner of every man's destiny, the controller of every detail in every individual's life, which is another way of saying He is God.

And frankly the only reason to believe in election is because it is found explicitly in God's Word. No man and no committee of men originated this doctrine. It's like the doctrine of eternal punishment. It conflicts with the dictates of the carnal mind. It's repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart. And like the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the miraculous birth of our Savior, the truth of election, because it has been revealed by God, must be embraced with simple and unquestioning faith. If you have a Bible and you believe it, you have no choice. Even the foreknowledge that Peter refers to is not to be confused with foresight, thus making man sovereign, deserving of some credit for making a good choice, seeking God on his own terms, and making God some kind of a reactor who is in Heaven saying, "Oh, come on guys, please. You know I'd really like it to work out this way." The term foreknowledge, *prognōsis* in the Greek, is used in 1 Peter 1:20 to refer to Christ, and it refers to a deliberate choice. Well, those are just some general preliminaries to what I really want to say, now you can start timing me. This part counts.

Where do we begin to understand, with reference to the Church, the doctrine of election? Let's begin in Matthew. And let's begin in Matthew in a very, very prominent and familiar place, Matthew 16:18. And I have so much to say, I am going to try to talk as fast as I can – squeeze it in. Matthew 16:18, Jesus said this, just starting in the middle of the verse, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." There is a monumental statement, "I will build My church." It's a statement of certainty. It's a

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statement of intimacy, My church. It's a statement of invincibility, "The gates of Hades," which is a Jewish euphemism for death. If Hades is the abode of the dead, then the gate is how you get in there, and the way you get into the abode of the dead is by dying. So it's just a euphemism for death, which of course is Satan's greatest weapon. Jesus is saying, "I will build My church and the worst that can be done to stop it, the execution of my people, will not overpower it." This is a very, very straightforward promise. The immutable, sovereign, faithful, gracious, omnipotent Lord of heaven, whose Word can never return void, but always accomplishes the purpose to which He sends it whose plans always come to pass, whose will is ultimately fulfilled, whose plan is in the end invincible, has spoken and said, "I will build my church." Nothing can prevent that.

Now, let's look back a little bit. Go to Titus chapter 1 and see how the whole thing sort of started – Titus chapter 1. Often we pass over the introductory parts of Paul's epistle, which are pregnant with meaning and in this case, profoundly so. In Titus chapter 1, you have here a definition, I think, of essentially the definition of Christian ministry. "Paul, a bond-servant of God" – there's the large and generic category in which he finds himself by God's sovereign purpose. He is a servant of God. That's the broad definition of the role he has to play in this life. He is a servant of God. Specifically in the larger context of being a bond-servant of God, he is specifically an apostle of Jesus Christ. And then he says this, my ministry, basically is divided into three categories. First, my ministry unfolds, number one, "for the faith of the elect of God." He's talking here about the evangelistic emphasis of his ministry. He's talking about the matter of justification being the initial objective. He is to bring the message of the gospel in order that men might be justified before God. And he simply says this: I preach the gospel so that the elect can hear it and believe. That's exactly what he's saying. I preach the gospel so the elect can hear it and believe. There is that emphasis in my ministry that is directed at justification.

Secondly he says, there is that emphasis on sanctification. He says, then secondly, I bring "the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." There is the ministry of evangelism, and there is the ministry of edification. I bring the gospel to the elect so they can hear and believe. I bring the truth of God to those who believe so that they can move toward godliness. Thirdly, verse 2, he also emphasizes the hope of eternal life. And therein lies the third emphasis in his ministry, and that is glorification. The ministry of glorification which brings about immense encouragement in the face of difficulty in this life.

And here are the three dimensions of salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. This is the salvific character of his ministry. And as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he brought the whole counsel: God's justifying work, His sanctifying work, and His glorifying work. He said to those who heard him the gospel of Christ with great

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clarity, so the elect could hear and believe. And then those who believed, he taught the truth so they could become godly. And then he showed them what was to come in the hope of eternal life, which gave them great encouragement in the midst of difficulty. He emphasized those three familiar things. Justification, you are saved from the penalty of sin; sanctification, you are being saved from the power of sin; glorification, you will one day be saved from the presence of sin. This is the fullness of salvation which was the heart and soul of his ministry.

But I want you to notice the key is at the end of verse 2. This whole unfolding miracle of salvation comes from God who cannot lie and it says at the end of verse 2, "He promised it" – and this is the Greek – "before time began." He promised it before time began. Now when I read that the first time, I sat back in my little chair and I thought to myself, "To whom?" Before time began, to whom did He make that promise? Not to me or any other human being, because we weren't created. And I think the best understanding of Scripture would probably put the creation of angels at approximately the same moment in unfolding eternal history – if you can get a concept like that, pre-time. The creation of angels, probably about that same time. And it certainly wouldn't have been promised to angels anyway, because there is no redemption for angels. Right? So if they weren't there, it couldn't have been promised to them. And if they were there, it wasn't promised to them. And that leaves us with the question, to whom did He make this promise?

Second Timothy chapter 1 introduces us to a dimension of it, I think, that helps answer the question. The end of verse 8, God is referred to, and it says, "God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace" – follow this – "which was granted us in Christ Jesus" – and here is the exact same Greek phrase – "before time began." To whom did God make this promise? It's an inner-Trinitarian promise. I believe, uniquely, it involved a promise from the Father to the Son – from the Father to the Son. I'm treading on sacred ground, as best I can understand it feebly, and I'll try to support that in a moment from the Gospel of John. Let me just give you the picture.

In the feeble understandings of the anthropomorphic ideas, there was a moment in eternity when the Father determined to express His infinite and perfect love to the Son. And we can understand that there is an inter-Trinitarian love, the likes of which is incomprehensible and inscrutable to us. But this we know about love – it gives. And at some eternal moment the Father desired to express His perfect love for the Son. And the way He determined to express that was to give to the Son a redeemed humanity as a love gift. A redeemed humanity whose purpose would be, forever and ever, throughout all of the eons of eternity, to praise and glorify the Son and serve Him perfectly. That was the Father's love gift. To express His love, He wanted to give a redeemed humanity.

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Evidently the angels wouldn't suffice to be in heaven praising the Son, because there were characteristics of the Son for which they could never praise Him, because they had never fallen and they had never been redeemed. And because it's in the nature of God to be gracious, He must manifest that grace and be exalted for it forever and ever and ever. And He wanted to give a love gift to the Son, and so He predetermined to do that. Not only did He predetermine to do it, but He predetermined who would make up that redeemed humanity, and He wrote their names down in a book of life before the world began. And He said, "This is the love gift I want to give to you. And they will forever and ever and ever praise and glorify your name."

When you get a glimpse into heaven, in the book of Revelation, what are they doing up there? What are the saints saying up there? "Worthy is the Lamb." And I think that's just a glimpse of what's going to go on up there forever. The Father then determined to give a redeemed humanity as a love gift to the Son, which means – if I can be so bold as to say it – you and I are somewhat incidental to the real issue here. Salvation is primarily for the honor of the Son, not the honor of the sinner. The purpose here is not to save you so you can have a happy life. That's a by-product. The purpose here is to save you so that you could praise the Son forever and ever and ever.

Just to further understand this, turn in the Gospel of John to what has to be a most remarkable insight with few parallels into this very theme. In John chapter 6, Jesus says this, verse 37, "All that the Father" – what? Gives who? Just mark that in your mind. "All that the Father" – what? – "gives Me." Now that's exactly what I've been saying. Every redeemed individual is a part of an elect, redeemed humanity that is a gift from the Father to the Son. "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me." Why? I'll tell you why. Verse 44. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." So all that the Father gives are drawn. All who are drawn, come. All who come, I receive, and I'll never turn one of them down. Why would the Son turn down a love gift from the Father? It's not because you're so inherently desirable. It's because you are a gift from the Father to the Son. It is the infinite love of the Son for the Father. It is the perfect gratitude for the expression of that love by the Father that opens the arms of the Son to embrace the gift. All that the Father gives shall come and all that come, I receive.

And there's more. Verse 39, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose none, but raise it up on the last day." So here's how it works. The Father chooses, writes the names down in the Lamb's Book of Life of who that redeemed humanity will be to be given to the Son as an expression of love. Then in time the Father draws. When the Father draws, the sinners come, when the sinners come, the Son receives them. When the Son receives them, He keeps them and raises them the last day to bring the plan to fruition. He must do this, according to verse 38, "I've come down from heaven,

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not to do My own will" – not to fulfill some plan of My own – "but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose none, but raise it up on the last day."

Inherent in this whole doctrine, you understand, is the doctrine of the security of the believer, the perseverance of the saints – right? – because it's all built into the plan. He holds His own that have been given to Him by the Father, and He has lost none of them and never will. He'll bring them all the way to resurrection. Why? Because they are love gifts from the Father. They are precious, not so much inherently in who they are, but they are precious in the fact that they are expressions of the Father's perfect love to Him for the purpose of glorifying and honoring and serving Him throughout all of eternity. And the Son will keep them. He'll hold onto them. And if there is a circumstance that would be more than they could bear, He'll make sure it doesn't happen to them. If He has to, He'll intervene into that circumstance. It's not just by some divine fiat. It's by the ongoing, incessant care of the Savior, the High Priest for His people, that we are kept in the plan.

Go to the seventeenth chapter of John. I think this is one of the most remarkable components of this thing. Jesus is anticipating the cross, and He realizes there's going to be a period of separation from God, expressed of course in those provocative words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And there are elements of that experience which He has never had heretofore, and who is He concerned about? He can say on the cross, "Into Thy hands I commit My Spirit." He had no problem in trusting God with Himself. In John seventeen He entrusts not Himself to God, but His own. After all He had the responsibility to hold onto them and lose none of them and raise them up at the last day, and now He's going to go through some kind of deep water, the likes of which He has not heretofore experienced, and He is concerned about what could happen to them in the interval in which He might not be able to attend to them.

Look at verse 9. He's praying for them, for His own who are in the world. Verse 7 – we'll start at verse 7, "Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; they received them and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou did send Me." These are My own because of faith. Now verse nine, "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world" – I'm not concerned about them. Isn't that an amazing statement? They're not mine – "but [I ask on behalf] of those whom Thou hast given Me." There's that same concept. "For they are Thine." And You gave them to Me and I'm not going to lose them. But I'm going to go through something here and I don't know what's going to happen to them when I'm not, even for a moment, there to hold them.

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Verse 11, "I'm no more in the world; yet they themselves are in the world" – I'm leaving and they're going to be here – "and I come to Thee, Holy Father" – and here is the main request of this whole chapter – "keep them in Thy name." Is that an incredible statement? Lord, I can't hold them for whatever moment. I'm going to be bearing this separation. Would You just take over for Me and keep them? They're Yours and You gave them to Me, and I will be faithful and I'll hold them, but there's going to be a moment, and I can't hold them. Would you do it then? "While I was with them," verse 12, "I was keeping them" – I've been keeping them all along – "them which Thou hast given Me." He says it again. "And I guarded them and not one of them perished but that son of perdition" – that is to say, the one who was born to perish – "that the Scripture might be fulfilled." I've been keeping them just as I said I would. You said You'd give them to Me, and I said I'd take them, and I said I'd hold them, and I wouldn't lose them, and I'd raise them. And Lord, I've kept them all the way along and now I'm leaving, and I just need you to keep them for the time when I'm not here.

Verse 15 – was Jesus anticipating a window of opportunity for Satan? Verse 15, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from" – what? – "the evil one." Isn't it incredible to realize that if you were out of the care of God for a moment you could be catapulted into perdition? And verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also" – here it is again – "whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory." You see that's the point. I want them to be able to behold My glory. I want them to worship Me and serve Me and honor Me, which Thou hast given Me. Why did He give them to the Son – verse 24, end of the verse – "For Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world." There's the whole key. The Father's perfect love for the Son. The Father determines to give the Son a redeemed humanity. The Father gives the Son the redeemed humanity, says, "Hold onto them." The Son has a moment in which He fears they won't have His attention and says, "Oh, Father just guard them for that moment. You gave them to Me. They're precious to Me because they're Your love gifts." Do you understand that this doctrine of election is *way* beyond us? *Way* out of our capabilities to comprehend. We are all caught up in inter-trinitarian expressions of love that are unfathomable.

Now, there's more, Romans 8 – Romans 8:29, "For whom He foreknew" – and there's that idea of foreordination. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined." And He predestined them "to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the *prōtotokos* among many brethren. This is mind-boggling. This is just incredible. Two things I want to point out in verse 29 among the many things that could be addressed. We were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Now listen to this, when God predestined us by His elective purpose, He didn't predestine us to the beginning of

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our salvation. He predestined us to the end of it. Okay? It doesn't say He predestined them to be justified. It says He predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son. And when is that going to happen? When we see Him, 1 John says, and we are like Him. That's going to happen at the glorious manifestation of the sons of God, that's going to happen, Philippians 3:20 and 21, "when this vile body is gone and we receive a body like unto His body." Right? So here is the other component. Not only is God saving a pre-chosen, redeemed humanity who will forever and ever and ever praise and glorify the Son and serve Him and honor Him, but listen to this, they will be made like Him. And the supreme compliment is imitation. Right? So Christ then becomes the Chief One, the *prōtotokos*, among many who are made like Him.

What does that mean? Look, as much as glorified humanity can be like incarnate deity, we'll be like Christ and He will not be ashamed to call us brothers. And when we get to heaven – Paul says, I'm just looking for the prize of the upward call. What's the prize of the upward call? What's the prize when you are called up? The prize when you're called up is Christlikeness – Christlikeness. Paul says the prize of the upward call is the goal here. If I was saved to be like Christ in the glory, then my goal here, as much as is possible by the power of the Spirit, should be to be like Him now. And that's the mark that He pressed toward. We will be made like Christ, conformed to the image of His Son, and He will be the Chief One among us all. And we'll praise and glorify His name forever and ever and ever and ever. This is the elective purpose of God, and nobody's going to fall through the cracks. In the one moment of all of redemptive history, where there might have been a potential for the evil one to intercept the plan, the Son, when He passed out of a moment's responsibility, turned us over to the care of the Father. The plan will come to pass.

There's a remarkable conclusion to this. In 1 Corinthians 15 – in 1 Corinthians 15 – this is indeed some grand language, 1 Corinthians 15:27. There is coming a time, in the future, when the last enemy is abolished, verse 26, death, when Christ will reign, because all the enemies will be under His feet, verse 25. Verse 27, there's a time coming when He will have put all things in subjection under His feet, the King of the universe will take His rightful throne. He will unroll the scroll, the title deed to the earth, and He will take back the universe that is His. And everything is put into subjection, and all the redeemed humanity are gathered into glory and all the redeemed humanity are made like Jesus Christ, and all of them are there in the fullness of the glory. And verse 28, and when all of that is done, "Then the Son Himself, also, will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him that God may be all in all." You say, what is that saying? What's that saying is that when the whole love gift of the redeemed humanity has been given to Jesus

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Christ, then Jesus Christ takes that redeemed humanity, and including Himself, and gives it all back to the Father as a reciprocal expression of the same infinite love.

You can't take the doctrine of election as if it were some little piece of something and stick it over in a corner and debate whether it's true or not. This is the whole of redemptive history. It's at the heart of all of it and do you understand, that understanding is at the heart of what the church is. That informs how I treat other believers, doesn't it? No wonder Jesus said you'd better be careful never to lead another believer, one of my children, into sin. You'd be better off dead. Do you understand who you are dealing with? That informs evangelism. That defines for me my task.

Now, there's one component that I haven't brought up, but I need to. Jesus played a role in this whole thing, didn't He? The Father had to get to the point where He said to the Son, "In order to make this happen, I have to ask you to do something. You need to go into the world and be the offering for their sins." And when He said in John 6, He came into the world to do the Father's will, He wasn't saying, "this is Thursday and I've got three appointments that He's set for me." No. What He was saying is, "I came to die".

Do you understand how precious the Church is? It's precious because it's a love gift from the Father to the Son. Secondly, it's precious because of what it cost the Son to receive the gift. How precious is it? Two verses – and I'm going to close with this – two verses explain how precious it is. Second Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," – so gracious of Him to do this, in partnership in the Father's plan – "that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." He was rich. How rich? Well, how rich is God? Boundlessly rich, infinitely rich. "Yet for your sakes ... that you might become rich" – now you can't equivocate here. He was rich spiritually with the riches of God, and He did something in order that you might become spiritually rich with the riches of God. Same riches. And what did He do? He became what? Poor.

In reading St. Augustine on this verse, he launched into a description of Jesus' earthly economic condition. In reading Thomas Aquinas, you find the same thing and even John Calvin in his commentary makes much of this as a reference to Jesus earthly poverty and economic deprivation. May I suggest to you that it has nothing to do with anything? That the earthly economic status of Jesus is meaningless in terms of redemptive work. The poverty being spoken of here is not earthly economics. It is a divestiture of His prerogatives as deity. We're not talking about the fact that He didn't have much money. The fact of the matter is, if that was the saving issue, then He should have been poorer than He was. After all He was raised in a family that had their own home. His father had his own business. He certainly wasn't a beggar. He traveled with a group of men that

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didn't have a lot, but that was because they were itinerate preachers. Before that time they all had a trade. Jesus probably had learned His father's trade and would have been an outstanding carpenter, obviously. He was no beggar.

The issue here is not economic conditions. The gospel can no more be equated with financial poverty on Jesus part than it can be equated with His pain on the cross. Those are incidental. Such matters may tug at the heart of human emotion and elicit some sympathy but have nothing to do with salvation. The poverty here is the poverty of the kenosis. It's the poverty defined in Philippians 2. He thought it not something to hold onto to be equal with God, but voluntarily stripped Himself of that and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man even to the point of death. How poor?

One other verse in 2 Corinthians 5. This verse is – this is just so rich, and I may be treading on someone else's theme here a little bit, but I can't resist this. Second Corinthians 5:21. How poor? "He made Him who knew no sin" – what? – "sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." I don't know, these 15 Greek words may be the most profound in the New Testament, the greatest summary of the doctrine of justification. Can I just briefly take you through? "He" – being God – "made Him who knew no sin" – who's that? You don't have a lot of options, frankly. He made Him who knew no sin – "He made Him who knew no sin" – the Greek says – "sin." What does that mean? You ever think about that? What does it mean?

I was reading some material and listening to some tapes by some of the "Word-Faith" teachers. This is what they espoused. On the cross, they said, Jesus became a sinner, *and* He needed to go to hell for three days to have His sins expiated through punishment after which God released Him to the resurrection. Is that what it means that He became sin? Somebody will say, well that's ignorant. It's more than ignorant; it's blasphemous. Do you understand that hanging on the cross He was as spotless and sinless and perfect as ever before or ever since? He wasn't guilty of anything. If He was guilty of anything, He couldn't have died for us. He was the spotless Lamb of God without blemish. Hanging on that cross, He was not a sinner. You say, well in what sense was He made sin? One simple sense. And if you grasp this you're going to grasp the whole point, I think. On the cross Jesus was guilty of nothing, but God treated Jesus as if He had committed personally every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe. Did you grasp that? God treated Him personally as if He had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe, though in fact, He committed none of them. That's what substitution means. And then God exploded the full fury of His wrath against all the sins of all who will ever believe, against Jesus, and exhausted His wrath on Him. He was no sinner. God treated Him as if He was.

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And the other side? In order that – He did it "on our behalf, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Listen to this. People say, well why did Jesus have to live all those years? Why didn't He just come into the world and die? Because He needed to live a perfect life. He needed to fulfill all righteousness. Why? So that His life could be imputed to us. I've got news for you. You're not righteous. Do you understand that? You're not righteous, and the people sitting around you know that. People living in your house know that. We all know that. You're not righteous. Are you ready for this? On the cross, Jesus wasn't a sinner. God treated Him as if He was. And you're not righteous, but He treats you as if you are. Are you ready for this? On the cross, He treated Jesus as if He lived your life, so that He could treat you as if you had lived His. That's imputation. That's substitution. And Jesus came and became that poor, to exchange His life for yours in order to fulfill the elective plan of God, that He might do the will of God perfectly and in the end give back to God the very love gift that the Father had given to Him. Let us pray.

Father, we contemplate this great immense doctrine. It is pride crushing. It is God exalting. It is joy producing. It is privilege granting. It is holiness promoting. It is strength giving. And oh, God, the only thing that remains is that we would look at our own lives, as Peter said, and make our calling and election sure. To that end we pray for every soul here, for your glory and honor. Amen.

MP3 Audio File: https://cdn.gty.org/Audio%2FSermons%2FGTY_65_38725065d0.mp3

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