

ELECTION AND EVANGELISM

Religious folk, many so-called 'evangelical Christians' and even some who claim to be 'reformed' in doctrine, consider the declaration of God's eternal purpose of sovereign grace in election before the beginning of time to be inappropriate when it comes to seeking the lost with the gospel of salvation from sin. They think that it will be a great deterrent to any hearer choosing to trust Christ for salvation. But God himself has declared clearly in his word that nothing could be further from the truth.

The Bible is consistently clear that God has ordained all things that happen, the course of world history, in fact everything. He ordained even the fall in Eden that his eternal purposes of grace might shine through eternity. Before time began he chose a multitude in His Son to be the heirs of eternal salvation from sin and, as much as flesh recoils from the idea, he left the rest of mankind that he did not elect to eternal life to the strictly just consequences of their sin and rebellion against his rule.

So, if the eternal state of everyone who has ever existed, and will ever exist, was determined before time began, why do we bother trying to persuade people to believe the gospel? What difference can our preaching possibly make?

The answer of Scripture is that it is what God in his infinite wisdom has determined. It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. Even the Lord Jesus Christ himself in his earthly ministry adopted this method of seeking and finding those that were his people from eternity.

Why else did he go to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon in Matthew 15? Surely because he knew that one of his lost sheep was in that pagan society in a state of adversity seeking his blessing. And even as he answered her plea for mercy and help with the stark doctrine of limited atonement, of salvation only for God's elect, so he knew that his Holy Spirit would have given new life to that poor soul to fear God and seek his mercy. The 'great faith' that he attested that she had shown was but the sovereign gift of God by which she apprehended the salvation accomplished for her from eternity and that he himself would shortly accomplish in time at Calvary.

When we bow to the truth of God's sovereign grace; when we declare it unashamedly, we know it is not a deterrent to belief of the gospel but the only way that God's true, but lost, sheep will be called out of this darkened world into the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

"Goats" will indeed turn away when sovereign grace preached as they did in John 6, but God's sheep are made willing to believe in the day of his power (Ps110:3). Rather than being a doctrine which we acknowledge but keep under wraps in case we scare hearers away, we delight in it and trust God to exert the 'power of God unto salvation' which is the true gospel. AJ