



Predestined unto life in Christ

Chapter three of the Confession of Faith is entitled "God's eternal decree".

Section five of the chapter on God's decree deals with the nature of predestination. Several important points are made.

First, the point is emphasised that God elected his people to life before the world was made. Or, to put it otherwise, as the world was shaped and as men were placed in it, God's decree to save lay behind all that God did. Creation, therefore, was no arbitrary act, but an act for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. As God made the universe, he was preparing a stage upon which He would enact the great drama of his salvation and electing purpose.

The Confession puts side by side the immensity of a God-shaped universe and the personalness of God's eternal interest. In other words, as I survey the glory and grandeur of the universe God made, and stand in awe before the breadth and height of it, I am reminded that he has taken an interest in me, personally and individually, and that from all eternity he purposed to bring me into the fellowship of the saints in light. As the psalmist has it, *"I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinks on me"*.

Secondly, God's election is described as *"according to his eternal and immutable purpose and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will"*. Predestination belongs to the secret things of God. We believe that he has a purpose in the world, and that it is unalterable and unchangeable. We believe that God acts according to a holy and single impulse, by which the destinies of men and angels are shaped by him. There is no compulsion external to himself, and no regret over what he has done.

What there is, is a personal, holy, divine decree, which alone can secure the salvation of sinners.

It is precisely this fact that gives the gospel its guarantee of success. God's word will fulfill his purpose, wherever it is sent, and however it is sent. It may be preached well, and it ought to be preached well; it may be preached poorly, but ought never to be preached poorly; it may be translated, distributed and circulated in book or tract form; but the one thing that ensures it will never go out in vain is that behind it there are secret things known to God. And among these secret things is the fact of particular redemptive interest in sinners. Our encouragement is not what we see, but that He foresaw the end from the very beginning.

Thirdly, election is in Christ. How often the phrase 'in Christ' appears in the Bible! It is the very definition of living, vital Christianity. And God chooses in Christ, binding the decree to save for ever with the Person of His Son.

God's people, therefore, have an interest in Jesus as the Saviour God sent and as the One in whom God elected. At last, that is what makes election so precious; that far from being impersonal, it finds its root and its expression in the greatest Person of all. Our guarantee of election is our possession of Jesus. There is no election apart from Him. The one evangelistic response to those who say "If I'm elect I'll be saved" is — "do you have Jesus?", for God knows of no election apart from Him.

The fact that election is in Christ ought to temper our presentation of it and our preaching of it. Christ was in election, and in election there is no un-Christlikeness. You can trace the whole of salvation back to the fountain head of a loving, gracious, decision to save, and as you do you find

Christ there all along the line. The difference between biblical election and blind fatalism is the presence and the insistence of Jesus.

Fourth, predestination fixes the ultimate salvation point not on conversion or justification or even adoption, but on *"everlasting glory"*. We do not stop at the exercise of faith; that is only the beginning. That is, to use Boston's phrase, *"begun recovery"*. God's grand design is the bringing of many sons to glory, for which he paid the price of the giving up of the one Son he had in the glory.

Paul describes the glory as being made into the image of Jesus Christ, God's Son. That is the blueprint on which every new creation in Christ is modelled. We do not know what we shall be, but when he appears we shall be like him. There is nothing more glorious than the Person and the exalted nature of Jesus Christ. It is to that point that predestination determines to take the people of God, reforming them and transforming them until at last he conforms them to the image of his Son.

Fifthly, election flows from *"free grace and love"*. It is not earned, not merited, not worked at, nor asked for. It comes to us out of the depths of the being of the God who is love, the God who does not need to save, but who loves to save, the God who is able to save, and who channels all the interests of His saving grace into a redemptive plan. So much is this true that at last the apostle can say *"He loved me, and gave himself for me"*.

As election is in Christ, so election is in love. The love that chooses is the love that gives. The love that fixes the decree to save with an unalterable and unchangeable determination is the love that says *"here is my Son — take him for your own"*. The grace that issues in a divine, sovereign act of salvation, is the grace that pours down on sinners at Calvary, offering us life, if we will but come to Christ.

Finally, election is not because of any foresight God had; it is not that he saw we would believe, or do good works, or persevere either in faith or in good works; it is not because he saw any good in us as a condition of his election that he chose us. To be sure he foresaw all these things; but as the *result* of his predestinating us, and not as its cause. There must be faith, and good works in the life of the saved people of God; there must be joy, and peace, and life, and hope. There must be evidence of what He has done, and evidence of what grace has achieved. Where the Spirit is, there is fruit.

The seed of our salvation is in God's choice of us, and not in our choice of him. He chose to love us and he loved us through choice, not because of what we were, but despite it, and because of what he wanted us to become.

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