

**§ 11. Doctrine of Salvation**  
**Lecture 2**  
**Election and Calvinism Continued**

Welcome to Defenders! In our discussion of the doctrine of salvation we've been looking at a Calvinistic perspective on the notion of election. We saw that in Romans 8:28, Paul says that "those he [God] foreknew, he predestined." Some Calvinists take this to mean that God looks into the future and he sees the elect on whom he will bestow saving faith, and therefore knowing his own choice to give saving faith to these persons he then predestines them.

Many Calvinists, however, reject the idea that God's foreknowledge in Romans 8:28 has as its object the future decisions of people even if they are totally determined by God. According to these Calvinist theologians, foreknowledge doesn't really mean "to know something in advance," as though God looks into the future and finds out what is going to happen. Rather, "foreknew" is a way of saying that God loved them in advance. To say he foreknew them means that he foreloved them. He picks out certain persons in the future on whom he will set his love. Such foreknowledge is, in effect, to choose certain persons upon whom God will then bestow his love. It doesn't indicate a passive acquisition of information on God's part; rather this is an active bestowal of favor and love upon those persons whom God picks out.

Let's look at a couple of biblical passages where "foreknowledge" seems to be used in this way.

First, Genesis 18:19. Here God is talking about Abraham and God says in verse 19,

. . . I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.

You'll notice that in the translation I read, the verse is rendered "I have chosen him" but the word in Hebrew means literally "I have known him." So when it says, "I knew Abraham," it doesn't just mean "Yes, I know this guy." Rather, it means, "I favored him. I loved Abraham. I picked him out. I chose Abraham." Knowledge here is a much richer concept than just the acquisition of information.

Let's look at a couple of other examples that illustrate this usage. Psalm 1:6 says, "for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." This means much more than that God is aware of or informed about the way of the righteous. For in that same sense, he knows the way of the wicked, right? He is not uninformed about the way of the wicked and what the wicked do. So if this is to distinguish God's knowledge of the way of the righteous from his knowledge of the way of the wicked, it

must mean that God favors the way of the righteous. He somehow bestows approval and personal commitment to the way of the righteous. There is much more here than just the passive acquisition of information about the way the righteous live.

Finally, Jeremiah 1:5. This is a passage about the call of Jeremiah. Look at what God says to Jeremiah in verse 5 of chapter 1. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Before Jeremiah was even conceived, before he ever existed, God says, "I knew you." Again, that doesn't mean just that God had information about him. This is evident from the remainder of the verse: "Before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet."

So when Romans 8:28 says, "Those whom he foreknew, he also predestined" that means those whom God loved in advance, those whom he had picked out on whom to bestow his favor and his grace. Those persons he predestined. So to interpret Romans 8:28 merely in terms of mere foreknowledge without the sovereign bestowal of God's love and approval is to have a very thin concept of foreknowledge in this particular verse.

Charles Horn, a Reformed theologian, points out that in Romans 8:28-30 we have a description of God's eternal counsel, what he does in eternity before the foundations of the world. Then in verses 29-30 we have the actualization of this counsel in the human affairs of life. So, in God's eternal counsel we have, first, God foreknowledge of whom he would save. Second, there is then God's predestination. Those whom he foreknew or foreloved, he then predestined. That is to say, he ordained them to salvation. This is God's eternal counsel. From before the foundations of the world God foreknew and predestined certain persons to salvation.

Then in verses 29-30, we have the actualization of his eternal counsel described. First comes calling. Paul says that those whom he predestined, he also called. At some time in your life, if you have been predestined by God, he will reach out and call you to bring you to himself. This calling is an effectual calling. This is not some sort of mere invitation on God's part. This is God's reaching out and grabbing you and bringing you to him. It is what Jesus described as God the Father's drawing persons to himself. This is the notion of effectual calling. Then comes justification. Those whom he called, he also justified. This is by faith, which is not something that the unregenerate man can muster on his own, since he is spiritually dead and separated from God. Faith is something that God must bestow upon you. So God will justify by faith those whom he has effectually called. Then the final step in salvation is glorification. Those whom he justified, he also glorified.

This process has been called the unbroken chain in God's process of salvation. Those whom he foreknew, he predestined. Those whom he predestined, he called. Those whom

he called, he justified. Those whom he justified, he glorified. There is nowhere along the line that someone can drop out of this chain and fail to obtain salvation because it is the work of God throughout. His declaration or choice takes place sovereignly in eternity before the foundations of the world; then in human history it is actualized, as God effectually calls, justifies, and finally glorifies those whom he has predestined.

Having explained the Calvinistic scheme of salvation, let's say something more now about the notion of calling, which plays a very critical role in the plan of salvation. The Calvinist typically distinguishes between the *general call* of God (which goes out to every person indiscriminately) and the *special effectual call* of God (which is directed only toward the elect, those who have been chosen by God).

The general call to repentance and faith is issued to all of mankind. Examples of this general call would be found, for example, in John 7:37: "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink.'" You notice the universal term "anyone" – "if anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink." So this is a general invitation that goes out to all persons. Similarly, in Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Again, notice the universal quantification. "All" who labor and are heavy-laden are invited to come to Christ. And of course there is Matthew 28:18-19, which is the famous Great Commission given to the disciples,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Here the disciples are commanded to go out to everyone proclaiming the Gospel. Not just to the elect but to everyone. So this is an illustration of the general call that God issues to mankind to repentance and faith.

However, this general call is not in itself intrinsically efficacious. People can ignore this general call. They can refuse to respond to it and to repent and believe. Therefore, the Calvinist distinguishes a special call of God which is irresistible. This is called "effectual calling." When this sort of a call confronts a person, it is irresistible and will surely produce its effect. Romans 8:30 says, "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." So this is not just the general call. This is the special effectual calling of the predestined, of the elect. And once God calls them, then he justifies them.

Also turn back to Romans 1:6-7 where the Roman Christians are said to be called in this way. Paul says, "including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints . . ." This is interpreted as an example of effectual calling of these Roman Christians to be saints of God.

Also, 1 Corinthians 1:9, Paul says, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” So here again we supposedly have an illustration of this effectual calling to salvation on the part of the Corinthians. Then in verses 26-27 of the same chapter Paul says,

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, . . .

So God has chosen the Corinthians and now he has called them to be saints.

With respect to this special calling of God, Calvinists distinguish between the efficient cause, the moving or motivating cause, and the instrumental cause. The *efficient cause*, that is to say, that which produces the effect, is God himself. It is God who effectually calls the predestined into his Kingdom. Look at Galatians 1:15. Here Paul is reflecting on his own conversion experience. He says, “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me.” So here he refers to God as the one who had set Paul apart even before he was born, just like Jeremiah, and then at the right time God called him through his grace.

Also 2 Timothy 1:9. Picking up at the end of verse 8, “God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.” So here again the reference is to God. He, in virtue of his own purpose (not because of anything we’ve done), ages ago had set us apart and now he has called us into fellowship with himself.

So the efficient cause of this special effectual calling is God himself directed toward the elect.

The *moving cause*, or that which motivates this calling, is simply God’s will. Look again at 2 Timothy 1:9, “God, who saved us and called us . . . not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace . . . he gave us in Christ.” Just as we saw in Ephesians, it is simply God’s will. There isn’t anything about us that makes us special or more lovable that would motivate God to save us. It is simply God’s inscrutable will. He chooses to save those whom he wills and then he calls them.

Then the *instrumental cause*, that is to say the means by which the call goes out, is the Word of God. 2 Thessalonians 2:14, “To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is through the preaching of the Gospel, the Word of God, that people are called.

So through the Gospel as its instrumental cause, God reaches out to the elect (those whom he predestined) and he brings them – he calls them – into his Kingdom and justifies them.

Next time we'll discuss the Calvinistic perspective on regeneration. Until we meet again, may God give you a great week.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> □ Total Running Time: 18:51 (Copyright © 2020 William Lane Craig)