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Peace, Sun Prairie  
January 21, 2018  
Epiphany 2

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17  
THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

God says in Isaiah, *As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* God reveals certain truths and realities in the Bible that don't seem to make sense to our human minds. When I was a child and I would ask, "Why does God love me?" The answer I received was, "Because He's such a loving God." I was frustrated with that answer. That didn't seem like an answer. It seemed like a copout, like begging the question. I was sure there has to be some other explanation as to why God loves me. But, in fact, that *is* the answer, the only answer.

At times, we need to quiet our natural compulsion for a logical rationale from our human standpoint and simply let God speak.

The portion of God's Word we are meditating on today gives us an opportunity to peer into another one of the mysteries of God's plan for our salvation. We call it the Doctrine of Election.

When you step into the voting booth with your ballot on Election Day, you choose one candidate over another. In a similar way, the Doctrine of Election means that from eternity, before there was time or a world, God chose certain people to be saved. Listen to how the Apostle Paul declares it in his letter to the believers in Thessalonica: *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved.* "From the beginning" really means from the get-go, before you had a chance to do anything good or bad or have any virtues or vices, before you could contribute in any way to God's plans or have any say in the matter. Before anyone at all could advise or coach God, He chose you to be saved. He did it entirely on His own, independently, of His own free will, apart from any merit or any reason in you. Those whom God has chosen, we call the Elect.

The Doctrine of Election immediately puts all kinds of questions in our naturally inquisitive minds. Wait a

minute! I thought God wants all people to be saved! Didn't Jesus die for all? But God only chose some? How is that fair? How do I know if God chose me? What if He didn't? If God chose me does it matter how I live or what I do? Can I rob a bank and kill three people tonight? Does it matter if we tell other people about Jesus or not? Or is that just an exercise in futility?

As we are informed by our 2 Thessalonians reading we will try to address those questions as well as we can in 14 minutes. First of all, yes, Jesus did die on the cross for all people and yes, God does want all to be saved. Jesus said in John 3, *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

Yet here in 2 Thessalonians Paul writes to the believers, *From the beginning, God chose you to be saved.* Why does God choose some and not others? Is there some reason in me why God would choose me to be saved and not someone else? The answer is no. The Bible says, *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Even the Apostle Paul wrote, *I know that in me, that is in my human nature, there is nothing good.*

Most current religious flavors in America start with the notion that you are born with a free will in matters pertaining to God, that it is up to you to choose to be saved. Thus the burden of salvation rests squarely on your shoulders. Not only does that notion rob God of His glory in saving us, but imagine lying in bed at night wondering, “Did I really do it? Have I really turned my life over to Christ? Did Christ really enter my heart? What about those doubts or that anger or lust I felt earlier today?” That’s called the Monster of Uncertainty. To be uncertain about your salvation is the most dreadful thing in the world.

The Bible never talks that way. Just the opposite. Psalm 51 states, *Surely I was sinful from birth*. To the Ephesian believers, Paul wrote, *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins*. A dead person cannot make many choices. Humans who are born spiritually dead cannot make spiritual choices. 2 Thessalonians 2 says, *From the beginning God chose you*, not the other way around.

What we can do, and the Bible is replete with warnings about this, we can reject Christ and His Gospel and offer of salvation. Even as believers we can, by our own stubbornness, lose our faith in Jesus and our salvation.

Why does God choose some? In Romans chapter 9 God answers that question by saying: *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.* It's like when I used to ask, "Why does God love me?" The answer is because He's such a loving God. That's the only answer. When the question is, why would God choose me, the answer is because God is so merciful. That's the only answer. Beyond that, God owes us no explanation. If there were any other explanation, then grace would no longer be grace.

But how can I be assured God chose me? The simplest answer is just believe what He says that He has chosen you. Take Him at His Word. That's the only response God wants. Don't let yourself be tortured by any other questions. It was the Holy Spirit, according to God's eternal plan, who introduced you to Jesus and brought you to faith in Jesus in the first place. The Holy Spirit used the Gospel in God's Word, in Baptism and in the Lord's Supper to do that. Here's how 2 Thessalonians puts it: *From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord*

*Jesus Christ.* Notice how it says that: He called you. Not the other way around.

If a person sends you multiple invitations to attend their party and finally even telephones you, pleading with you to come to their party, you might safely conclude, “I guess they really want me to come to their party.” In the same way, every time you are reminded of your Baptism, every time you receive the Lord’s Supper, every time you hear a sermon or read your Bible, the Holy Spirit is calling you. You can safely conclude, “God really wants me in heaven.”

With that in mind, He also wants us to continue to spread the good news about Jesus to all people. He hasn’t revealed to us whom He has chosen. He has told us He wants all to be saved. He wants all to be invited. His plan, His only plan, is to use us as His agents to communicate His Word to lost souls, so that the Holy Spirit might also bring them to faith in Jesus. He has included us in working out that plan and He promises that everything we do makes an eternal difference in the Kingdom.

If God’s Word says He has chosen me, and I believe that, does it matter if I rob a bank today. I’m going to

heaven anyway, right? But God didn't choose you for sin. He chose you for a new path, a new life, a holy life that begins now and lasts for eternity. Excel and flourish in that new life with good works that glorify Him. Don't throw it away by persisting in unrepentance. This is the prayer that Paul added for the Thessalonian believers: *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*

God did not intend the Doctrine of Election to frighten you or to lull you into spiritual sleepiness. He revealed it to us for our encouragement and comfort. Think of it. Before you were even born, before this world even existed, God knew you, God chose you to be saved. Even as Jesus hung on the cross to win salvation, He knew your name, He had you in mind. And that eternal plan broke into this world and came home to you when you were baptized and God spoke through the minister and called you by name.

