

THE SOVEREIGN SELECTION

Scripture Lesson: John 6:35-40

Text: Titus 1:1

Songs: PH386; F8; F23; PH387; PH388 2,3; PH386 1

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Lord,

The hullabaloo of the 2009 election is behind us. Those of us who live in Iowa have a disadvantage unless we are a political junkie. We have the first caucus so we are immersed with political ads long before other states hear much about the candidates. Then we have been a swing state in recent election cycles so we again get a barrage of advertising. That is not pleasant in Iowa during an election year.

Now we are hearing about the opening days and week of the Obama presidency. As Christians, the Bible calls us to pray for all our leaders whether we voted for them or not. The election is over. Christians know that Barak Obama is not an accidental president, but one who is handpicked by God to rule us during these years. He is God's servant. That is why we are commanded to pray for Him.

In all the big things of life, God is present and in control with His election process. Do you remember He also cares about the hair on your head? Take out your comb or brush tomorrow morning and look at the hairs that just left your scull to stick in the brush or comb. Jesus said God the Father foreordained which hairs of your head would come lose tomorrow morning. Listen to Him. "And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:30) God controls the greatest events of the world like the election of the most powerful person in the world and smallest details of lives.

A God like that would not leave choosing His children to chance. He would not allow whom He wants as His adopted sons and daughters to just come into His family by happenstance. It is always by choice, God's choice. It is the same way adopted children come into their family: By a loving, willful choice of parents who wish to have children. We are made in His image so can see from our imperfect reflection what God is like. That is the clear conclusion we come to from life and everything we know about God in whose image we are fashioned.

The Bible is very clear about this choice of God. Six times Jesus calls His people elect. "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. And He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. (Matthew 24:22, 24, 31) Then we read later, "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom He has chosen, He has shortened them. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. And He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." (Mark 13:20, 22, 27)

When Jesus spoke that way He was going back to the way God has always worked. God always picks His people. Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys, Esau and Jacob. Their descendants are the Arabs and Jews of today who cannot get along. Looking back on that history Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls—she was told, 'The older will serve the younger'. Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'." (Romans 9:11-13) This is what the NIV Study Bible says about that last expression. "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.* Equivalent to "Jacob I chose, But Esau I rejected." From

earliest history God has been choosing His family. It started with Cain and Able and has never stopped. God does not change, nor does His method of choosing His family change.

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That is why Peter writes, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.” (II Peter 1:10.) That is why Paul addresses Titus as he does, “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.” (Titus 1:1) Through the centuries Christians have embraced this clear teaching of the Bible by singing about it. Let’s join them by singing, “Rock of Ages,” stanzas 2 and 3, number 388 in the Psalter Hymnal. [Song]

There are Christians who say, “God chooses based on behavior.” The idea is that God looks down and sees who is nice and chooses them. That is the Santa Claus approach to election. Santa looks out “To see who’s naughty or nice” and Santa Claus is coming to your town to reward good boys and girls. What do you think of that? Many of our evangelical Christian brothers and sisters will tell you they believe God chooses on behavior.

We don’t think that for a minute. We have five reasons for rejecting that. First, we saw what the Bible says. Nowhere was there even a hint that God chooses because of our behavior. Actually God sometimes chooses great sinners like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and Peter. Second, the songs of the church embrace the Biblical message of God’s choice of His family members. Third, that flies in the face of Who God is, the omnipotent One who does as He pleases. Fourth, it is contrary to what we see in everyday life. There are Christians whose behavior is awful. There are also those who have no desire to follow Jesus or be with Jesus’ people in church are as nice as can be. Fifth, we would never reduce the sovereign selection of God to the level of Santa. That would be bad. Scripture and common sense teach us God’s selection of His people by Divine election is how we are chosen for salvation.

That is why Jesus says, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:28,29)

We call this Biblical teaching Unconditional Election. There is nothing in us that makes God chose us. He chooses who to save because of His love. It is because God wants to that He saves us. That is why we sang, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.” That is Unconditional Election.

Remember that we are created in God’s image. What God does, we seek to imitate. Out of love God selects people to be saved. Then He brings them into His family, the church. Al Neuharth is editor of USA Today. He is in his upper seventies. His five children are seven to twelve years old right now. He and his wife out of their love for children after their own were out on their own selected five children to love and bring into their family. Angelina Jolie has adopted three foreign children with great media fanfare. Oprah has built schools in Africa for girls. GEMS have clubs in Africa so some girls get special care. In our many years with Bethany Christian Services we heard many stories of couples that fell in love with one particular child, adopted it, and brought him or her home. Does any body speak ill of these loving acts of Al Neuharth, Angelina Jolie, Oprah, GEMS, or people who adopt? No. We admire them as wonderful people who are sharing their love with children. When God does the same thing there are people who say it isn’t fair that God loves some and brings them into His family and passes others by leaving them in their sinful condition. Nonsense! When the GEMS began girls clubs in Africa did we say that because they could not do it for every girl in Africa it is a bad thing to do? Hardly! Instead we thank them for caring for some girls in Africa. We should also thank God that in His love He has brought some people into His family to share eternal life with Him. If you and I have been so chosen, we should express our thanks to Him every day, as we will forever in eternity. Since God’s choice to love and bring people into His family we have imitated with adoption, today we often call Unconditional Election “Adopted by God.” That phrase, “Adopted by God” accurately expresses what we saw the Bible teach.

What a great comfort that is! If salvation were up to us, we might never take it. If salvation were up to us, we could tire of it and turn from God. If salvation were up to us, we could let go of God. God can never let go of His people. That is why we sing, "How Vast the Benefits Divine," stanza 1 of Psalter Hymnal 386. [Song]