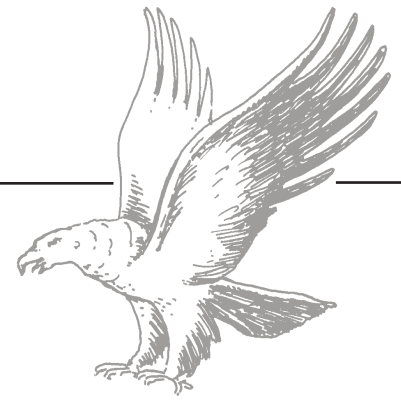


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



July 24, 2016

The Election of Grace

The Biblical doctrine of election bothers some believers, but the concept is really not that difficult to understand, once we recognize who is being chosen—and why.

“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom. 11:5-7).

“The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit” (Psa. 34:18).



The original word for “elect” and “election” in our English versions is *eklektos*, meaning “picked out, chosen.” The related word “eclectic” captures the idea well. Someone who has an *eclectic* taste in music, for example, picks and chooses songs from a variety of styles, rather than sticking to a single genre.

In Romans 11, election is a major theme in Paul’s description of the role of Israel in God’s plan. He contrasts Israel with “the elect”—the chosen ones. Israel did not obtain God’s salvation, while the elect did.

Who are these chosen ones, and how did they come to occupy that favored place in God’s eyes?

Beginning with Augustine (5th cent.), a popular interpretation holds that God pre-selects a small number of individuals to be saved, and the rest are lost. This selection is entirely arbitrary, in no way influenced by anything the individuals do or fail to do. Calvinists call this “unconditional election.”

This view, of course, raises serious questions. How can the Bible say that God “shows no partiality” (Ac. 10:34), if He randomly picks some to be saved and others lost? Why does the Bible repeatedly plead with people to choose salvation (Deut. 30:19; Prov. 1:29), when that choice was already made by God before we were even born?

There is another way to understand election that avoids these contradictions. David provides a clue in Psalm 34. God’s choice is not of *specific individuals*, but of a certain *type* of people, namely, those who have “a broken heart” and “a contrite spirit.” All those who are willing to surrender their pride

and pretension are welcome to come into God’s presence. God has chosen that *type* to be saved; but *we* choose whether or not we are of that type.

When children are chosen to play on teams for a ball game, the choosers make their selection based on *their ability to perform*—who can hit hardest, run fastest, or throw with the best accuracy. Throughout life, we are chosen (or rejected) based on such talent-based criteria. Those who have the talent get chosen; those who don’t get left behind.

But God chooses His people based on an entirely different criteria: humility of heart. That is a status available to everyone, regardless of intellect, wealth, education, physical prowess, or power. In fact, those who possess these earthly advantages generally have the hardest time learning how to be humble.

Which is precisely why God has chosen the contrite of spirit to be His people. They know they cannot lay claim to God’s favors on the basis of their own achievements. It is, Paul says, an *election of grace*, not performance. And unlike the proud, they appreciate it.

– David King