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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“The Doctrine of Election – III: Its Problem”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] -- we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are looking at the third in our series of studies in the doctrine of election. And our subject is the doctrine of election, its problems. And we will be considering the second part of this two-part series within the series on January the fifth because next Monday night we will not be meeting. Next Monday night I will be, according to our plans, in Vermont. My wife after thirty-one years has talked me into going to Vermont to ride in a one horse open sleigh at Christmas time. And believe it or not she said to me, no I'd better not say that. [Laughter] She said to me, “Louis before you die I want you to do one thing for me and that is to give me a ride in a one horse open sleigh.” And then I said, “What then?” [Laughter] She insists that it didn't come out that way but that's the way that I remembered it. And so we will be leaving Sunday afternoon after the football game. [Laughter] And going to Vermont for a couple of days. And I'm looking forward to that. By the way, we wrote one place in Vermont and asked for reservations. And we got the letter back and they gave us information about the reservations. And down at the bottom it says P.S. my husband has always promised me a ride on a camel. [Laughter] I guess it all depends on where you live.

Now, let’s turn to Ephesians chapter 1 and will you listen as I read from the Greek text verses 3 through 14? And, I’m going to translate so you won’t have to listen to the informations of the Greek in a Southern accent. Ephesians chapter 1 in verse 3,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, just as (or because) He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having foreordained us unto the adoption of sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He hath freely bestowed upon us in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He hath shed upon us, or cause to abound toward us with all wisdom and prudence, by making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him, unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in the Messiah, things in the heaven and things upon the earth—in Him. In whom also ye have obtained an inheritance, having been foreordained according to the purpose of the one who works all things according to the counsel of His will that we should be to the praise of His glory. We who first hoped in the Messiah, that is we’ve used. In whom you also having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance unto the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.”

Now, we have pointed out in our first two studies that some of the clearest passages in the New Testament contain the teaching of the doctrine of election. This, for example, is one clear passage. Paul says, “just as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.” We looked at Romans chapter 9 and we saw that in verse 6

through verse 29, Paul plainly thought that some are elected. Jacob have I loved. He also said Esau have I hated. He said he had prepared certain vessels before him unto glory. He spoke about others who were fitted unto perdition. In Romans chapter 8, Paul spoke about the fact that God works all things together for good to those who are the called according to his purpose. And then he gave us details of that call which began with foreknowledge and foreordination and then calling and justification and concluded in glorification. We read a passage such as 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 13 and 14 in which Paul states the same thing. That he has chosen us as a kind of first fruit.

Then we also made reference to the fact that one of the strongest statements in all of the Bible concerning election is the statement of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For example, in the 17th chapter of the gospel of John in his great high priestly prayer, he speaks about those whom the Father hath given to me. And he speaks about the fact that he does not pray for the world, but he prays for those whom the Father has given him. He speaks about those who belong to God. He speaks about those who are of the truth that they hear his voice. He speaks about his sheep. In fact, he speaks so specifically about his sheep that I want to read also three verses from the tenth chapter which have to do with that beginning with the 26th verse through the 29th. Where Jesus said,

“But ye do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; and no one shall anyone pluck them from of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of the hand of My Father. I and the Father are one in substance.” Verse 26, “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep.”

Now, I think we have established or have established at least to those whose minds are open at all that the New Testament teaches the doctrine of election. We can

surely say that it is a fact that the Bible teaches election. We shouldn’t have any question about that. It teaches it just as plainly as anything could be taught. You may not understand all about it but at least you can say the Bible teaches the doctrine of election.

It reminds me of an old story of King Charles the II and some philosophers who were gathered around discussing various things. And finally the King asked them a question. He says what is the reason why you have a pail of water and weighed it and then put a fish in it that the weight would be the same. And one philosopher offered an explanation. A second philosopher offered another explanation. A third offered still another and they discussed it for quite a while. And finally one of them said but King is it really a fact? And the King said no it’s not a fact. A pail of water does not weigh as much as a pail of water with a fish. It weighs more. So the first thing that we need to ask ourselves is something is fact before we start reasoning about it.

Now, election is a fact. And I think we can begin with that. We also saw that election is grounded in God not in man. There are three possible alternatives which I’ve suggested to you and they are these. God elects the good. The Bible makes it very plain that God does not elect the good. As a matter of fact, he does not even save the good, the righteous Jesus did not come to die for. He came to die for sinners. The second alternative is that God elects those whom he foresees would believe. And the third alternative is God elects those whom he has purpose to save by faith in Christ. Is the reason in God or is the reason in man? It should be obvious to us that if salvation is of the Lord than the proper answer to the question which of these alternatives is correct is surely the last. God does not elect the good. He does not elect those whom he foresaw would believe, but he elects those whom he purposes the saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

Election we saw was not grounded in man’s will. Paul said, “It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth.” And John said the same thing, “We were born not by the willeth to flesh, by the will of man but by God.” Election is also not grounded in

human works. Paul states that in 2 Timothy chapter 1 in verse 9 and turn over there with me because that text says something else also. And we should be familiar with it. Second Timothy chapter 1 in verse 9, Paul writes, “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace given to us in Christ Jesus before eternal times.” He hath saved us and he hath called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. In other words, our salvation is not grounded in works.

Now, Ephesians has said in the passage that we read more than once that our salvation is grounded in the good pleasure of God. Paul states it in Ephesians 1:5. he states it also in Ephesians 1:11. Now, it is true, as we have seen, that God also says through the New Testament writers that our election is grounded in foreknowledge. But we pointed out last time that the foreknowledge of which the Bible speaks is not foreknowledge of what we would do. It is foreknowledge of what he would do for us. It is not what he foreknew in Romans 8:29 but whom he foreknew. We saw that the word foreknowledge is a synonym for foreordination or predestination. One stressing the goal we are foreordained to a certain goal. The other stressing the intimate relationship into which God enters with us. When he does elect us, he foreknows us. So that is a word of intimate preknowledge. It’s a word of election. But it is foreknowledge, not of what we would do, foreknowledge of what he would do for us.

Now, please bear that in mind. I would just challenge you over the Christmas holidays why don’t you read the Bible and begin in Genesis and just look for one thing. Just look for one text that says that God chose us because he saw that we would believe. Or to put it in the words that we are discussing, find one text that says that God elected us because he foreknew what we would do and based his choice upon that. Now, it would do you good to read the Bible but I assure you, you’ll never find a text like that. It’s not in the Bible.

Now, the thing that we’re trying to point out then is that all human merit is ruled out. Not only in the doctrine of salvation, we often say that don’t we? Salvation is of the Lord. Didn’t Jonah say that? Didn’t David say that? Isn’t that really the heart of Paul’s theology, salvation is of the Lord. It is not of men. It is of grace through faith. It’s not of men. It is of God. And so from beginning to end, the work of God in salvation is his work. If anyone is to be saved at all from beginning to end, it is God who does the saving.

Spurgeon used to like to say that he found no great difficulty at all in believing in the doctrine of the eternal punishment of those who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. But he found a great deal of difficulty in believing in the doctrine of the salvation of sinners. That is an amazing thing. If you look at man’s nature according to the Bible and what he is as a result of the fall, it’s not surprising that men are to be judged and judged eternally. But it is surprising that a holy God should save men. I want to assure you that he does it entirely by his own activity and not with our help.

Finally, we said, we didn’t say this but I wanted to say this - time ran out, election has a near purpose - our salvation. It has an intermediate purpose of holy life. And there are texts that we could point to for each of these points. And it has an ultimate purpose - the glory of God. In other words, the first aim of election is that we should be saved. The second aim is that we should live a holy life. Election is not just a doctrine to get us from earth to heaven. It is a doctrine which not only brings us into life but is related to the life we live when we believe in Jesus Christ. And that doctrine does not finish with us until we are in the presence of God and God is glorified by the fact that we are there.

Now, what about the problems? How can we handle all of the problems that men can raise in the light of this doctrine which seems so arbitrary to our human reasoning? Now, let me remind you before we look at some of them that man’s nature as a result of the fall is sinful. Now, that means that apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit that you and I cannot even reason correctly. That our reasoning processes are affected by the fall

of man. Our minds are darkened. Our ears, spiritual ears, are deaf or deafened as a result of what has happened to us. And when we are converted there begins the process of renewal. The Bible calls it sanctification. It also calls it renewing which the Holy Spirit does to bring our minds which have been deranged spiritually back to the place where we can think straight about spiritual things. So if you should find a great deal of difficulty in logic in the truths of Holy Scripture do not be surprised. It is not because God is difficult. It is because your mind is deranged spiritually.

Now, you may be a very normal kind of person otherwise, but every one of us is abnormal spiritually. And so we are brought into the Christian life possessed of new life but we still have the old nature, we still have our old thinking processes, we still have our old habits of mind and God through the Holy Spirit begins the long process of bringing us to the place where we recognize that we really are before God. So if you’re puzzled, if you are disturbed, if sometimes you think God is irrational, please remember that it is not God who is irrational it is you who are irrational. And if I’m not able to explain everything to you, please do not blame it on me. I mean do not blame it on God. Blame it on me. It’s because I have not yet begun to think as I hope to think someday.

Now, to express this first problem election is inconsistent with human freedom and responsibility, I’d like to remind you of the statement that Paul made in Romans chapter 9 because this is the way in which he put it. “Thou wilt save him unto me. Why duth he God yet find fault for who hath resisted his will. If God is sovereign in his electing distinguishing grace and he has chosen some and he has not chosen others then will not men say how can God find fault in me who have not been chosen. How can a man resist his will.” And so Paul knew that his doctrine was the kind of doctrine that provoked these questions of inconsistencies. How can believe in a sovereign God who absolutely elects according to his own purpose in grace and yet at the same time believes that men are free and responsible before God? In other words, to put the problem this

way, can a person be a free responsible agent if his actions have been foreordained from eternity?

Now, let’s begin and try to go through some things that will help us to see this problem in the proper light. Capital A - free agency, a word of clarification. What do we mean by free agency? Now, what I mean by free agency is this. Man is free in the sense that he is the author of his own act. He acts according to his own view, according to his own convictions, according to his own inclination, according to his own disposition. We all feel that we are free. Do we not? That is the human side of it. You would probably say that when you believed in Jesus Christ you felt that you made a decision for him. You freely decided to trust Jesus Christ as your savior. Then you began to read the Bible and you discovered that the reason that you believed in the Lord Jesus was because he had already chosen you and he had by his spirit moved upon your heart to bring you to the place when you were willing. But his activity was a silent secret kind of activity in your heart. You sensed the resistance that you had to God’s will but you felt, until you began to read the Bible, that it was really your decision. I’ve even heard people say that they saved themselves. And they were expressing what actually they felt. I saved myself by believing in Jesus Christ. That’s the way they expressed it. And you know, even the Bible expresses it similarly. Paul says that he was all things to all men that by all means he might save some. Now, Paul didn’t save anyone but he meant that he might be the instrumentality in that salvation.

Now, what we mean then by free agency is that man is not forced to act contrary to his will. On the other hand, we do not mean by this that man is able to change his character by his volition by his will. Man is a slave. And he’s a slave to sin. So when we say free agency, when we say that man is a free agency, we do not mean that his will is free. We mean that so far as he is concerned, he’s the author of his own acts. He’s not forced to act contrary to his will.

Capital B - free agency and foreknowledge. Now, there are surprisingly some people who say I can believe in foreknowledge. I can believe God foreknew all that would come to pass. And that he knew that I would believe and that I have believed and therefore, I do not see any real objection between human freedom and responsibility and election because God saw that I would believe. And so the problem does not seem to be a real problem to them. How can a person be a free responsible agent if his actions have been foreordained from eternity? And he finds that he can easily understand that if you just change the word foreordained to foreknown. Can a man be a free responsible agent if his actions were foreknown from eternity? I would like to say to you that that does not solve our problem at all.

Now, let me just remind you this. If an action is foreknown from eternity, it is just as certain as if it had been foreordained. If it is foreknown from eternity, it is just as certain as if it had been foreordained. So we do not solve our problem by saying we believe in foreknowledge but not in foreordination. As a matter of fact, foreknowledge itself demands foreordination. Suppose we tried to say to ourselves that we believe in the foreknowledge of God but not in the foreordination of God. We believe God knew what was going to happen but he didn’t determine it. Now, all theologians will probably tell you that he knows things are going to happen beforehand because he has foreordained them. That’s why he knows. But now let’s just suppose that we have a doctrine of foreknowledge and that’s all there is to it. That God looked down through the years and he saw who would believe. And he chose them. Now, if that’s true, was there a time when he didn’t know? What if there was a time when he didn’t know then what do we have? We have a God who gains in knowledge. We have a God who at one time was not omniscient but now is. We have a God who actually is probably been surprised hundreds of thousands of times. As he looked down through the centuries, he saw that so and so would believe. John Calvin would believe. He said my that surprises me. I never would have thought that John Calvin would believe. [Laughter] And so on down

into the present day, and he said Lewis Johnson, well of all the people he’s the least likely to believe but sure enough he does believe, [Laughter] goody goody Lewis Johnson. I chose him.

Now, you see you have a God who has gained in knowledge. Now, on the other hand, if you say that God knew this from eternity then you have said that it was certain. Certain because it is foreknown from eternity, therefore, the problem still exists. Now, I’m saying this because we do not escape our problem of inconsistency by substituting terms foreknowledge with foreordination.

Capital C - free agency consistent with certainty. Some people seem to think that it is impossible for us to have free agency and at the same time to have certainty. If you have freedom, you ought to have uncertainty. Does not that seem natural? If we are free, then should not things be uncertain. Come on, it does. It seems natural doesn’t it? You see you’re thinking like the old man. And I don’t mean the old man your father. I mean the old man your father Adam.

Now, that is natural to think that way. If we have freedom, why we surely should have uncertainty. Now, I’m going to ask you to turn to a passage in the Bible, Acts chapter 2 in verse 23. Acts chapter 2 in verse 23. Free agency is consistent with certainty. Free action can exist in a climate of certainty. Now, let me ask you a question before we read our text. Let’s imagine you’re a parent. Most of you in this room probably have been parents. Let’s just imagine for a moment that your child is going to put his or her hand in the fire. Do you know how you’ll react? Of course, you know how you’ll act. Don’t you? You know exactly what you’d do. In fact, it’s absolutely certain if your child began to put his or her hand into the fire you would immediately reach out and grasp that hand and jerk it away from the fire. Wouldn’t you? Or would you just sit there and let the child do it? That’ll teach him a lesson. [Laughter]

Now, you see we are perfectly free, are we not? And yet it is certain that we shall act in a certain way. Freedom may exist in a climate of certainty. Let me ask you another

question. Is God free? As a matter of fact, God is the only free person in the universe. No one else is free as God is free, but even he is limited by his nature. But let’s say he’s free. He’s absolutely free. He may do according to his pleasure. Now, will God always do right? Of course, it’s certain that he will always do right but he’s free. Freedom may exist with certainty.

Now, let’s look at our text. “You men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did by Him in the midst of you, as you yourselves also know— Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” Certainty, certainty, determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” “Ye have taken and thy wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Here we have the divine certainty with the human activity in conjunction with it. They are free agents, here free immoral agents, but at the same time, divine certainty the two sides that operate together.

Capital D - free agency and divine limitation. Now, we have said that man is a free agent and I’ve tried to explain that. That can be misunderstood and that’s why I went to the trouble of defining it. Man may deliberate. Man may decide. I’ve decided that I’m going to Vermont. I have some other alternatives staying in Dallas, having a disgruntled wife, and a few other things. But we deliberated, we decided. Now, there are things that I cannot do also. So while man is a free agent, he does not really have ultimate free will. For example, suppose I were to go down to the Republic National Bank building and leap off of the top. I have determine to jump off of the First National Bank building of the Republic National Bank building and at the twenty-fifth story, as I am going down, I say I will to be back on top or I will to have a safe landing as a second alternative. I cannot do that. There are other things, of course, that we cannot do. We cannot determine our place of birth. Would you have changed yours? I wouldn’t have, but I might have changed the family. I might have wished that Henry Ford was passing through Charleston and that I was born into the Ford family. After all, I might be

administrator of the Ford Foundation today. Would you like to have lived in the twentieth century or the first century? Probably knowing what you know you would settle for the first century wouldn’t you. You’d like to be born in Palestine. You’d like to be a member of the tribe of the family of Jesse, the tribe of Judah. In fact, you might like to be one of the apostles but you cannot do it.

Now, some of us have brains that are able to fathom the most intricate of mathematical problems and the rest of us have difficulty adding two and two. Some of us are male. Some of us are female. If we wanted to have an easy life, we’d all choose to be female. [Laughter] If we wanted to work hard, we’ll all want to be male. We cannot decide these things. We do not have ultimate free will. Now, that should be obvious to us.

Now, Capital E - free agency and divine persuasion. Is it possible for us to be a free agent and yet to have God divinely persuade us. Now, what I mean by divine persuasion is this that God so directs the inward dispositions of a man and his external environment that men freely do his will, that we freely do his will. Now, those of you in this room that are children of the Lord who have been born again, are you glad you are born again? Did you make a free choice? Are you sorry? Have you been dragged into the family of God and now you’d like to get out? I know you made a free choice but at the same time you know that it was the persuasion of God because there was a time when you were opposed to the will of God for your life. The Lord speaks of it, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” That’s divine persuasion. Draw him. Paul said, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” God performs a work upon the depraved fallen will of man so that they ultimately make a decision of the will to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. Their will is not free enslaved to sin but God freed it by his persuasion. Free agency may subsist with divine persuasion.

Now, men we know all about this. There was a day when our eyes first fell upon our wives and we were not willing. We were not responsive but they looked at us and then they began to exercise those female wiles of which are endless, I discovered down through the decades. [Laughter] And the surprising thing is that we who resisted and resisted and resisted were finally so persuaded that ultimately we came to enjoy them. And finally having been drawn to the altar, to use a biblical word, we said I do. [Laughter] And you know when we said I do it was as if we really wanted it. [Laughter] Female persuasion had been at work.

Now, we’ll never understand how that all came about. Those things are just as mysterious as the decrees of God in the Bible, but nevertheless, they are true. And so the same way God works in the hearts of men. He divinely persuades us so that we freely do his will. Now, if I could tell you how he does this, I would be God. I could not tell you that.

F - free agency and responsibility with foreordination in the Bible. In the final analysis, of course, we’re interested in what does the Bible say about this point. Now, let me say this. I’m just going to look at a couple of passages. I want you to just think about this that the premiere illustration, of course, is our Lord Jesus. Did he not follow a plan? Yes, he came to follow a plan. He came to give himself as a sacrifice for our sins to carry out the program of God. Did he not have freedom in his cross work? Yes, over and over the Bible says that he freely went to the cross at Calvary. So the divine foreordination, the divine plan, worked in perfect harmony with the voluntary sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s take Luke chapter 22, verses 21 and 22. Luke 22, verses 21 and 22. Our Lord speaks and he says, “But behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me, the hand of him that hands me over is with me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined, but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!” There is human

responsibility. “Woe unto that man who betrayed our Lord Judah,” human responsibility, divine sovereignty, and our Lord freely acquiescing in it all.

Let’s turn to Acts chapter 27 read two verses here. This is most interesting these two verses because they seem to say that it is possible for something to be certain but yet to be contingent at the same time. And that’s what we’re saying that our election is foreordained by God but at the same time, we freely respond in faith to God’s divine persuasion. Acts chapter 27 in verse 24 notice Paul remembers in the midst of the storm and there stands by him in the night the angel of God and says, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” In other words, Paul you are going to be brought before Cesar. Don’t worry you’re not going down in the storm and furthermore, God has given thee all of the sailors as well. You’re going to be the means for the safety of everybody on the boat. Now, notice Paul believing in the foreknowledge and the foreordination of God says in verse 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” In other words, he was absolutely sure they would be saved but they would be saved if they stayed in the boat. Just as we are absolutely certain that all of the elect shall come to heaven. But no one shall come to heaven because that does not believe in Jesus Christ. Free agency and responsibility with election, both in the Bible.

Now, finally - unlimited free agency unethical. I just want to say this because there are some people who think that there is a kind of merit in having absolute freedom. A completely free man would be as a man who is completely free who is absolutely unpredictable that you can never know what he will decide because he is absolutely free. He is not molded by his character by his nature at all. He is a completely free man. That man is no more ethical than a tossed coin. Praise and blame are utterly insignificant so far as he is concerned. The blamed man could say if he made a wrong choice yesterday should say ah that was my choice yesterday today I could chose this. A man who has absolute freedom is a man that you could never trust. A man who would chose one thing

one day and one the next, can you rely upon that kind of person? Actually, philosophers who have wrestled with determinism and indeterminism, I think those who are most thoughtful have come to believe that determinism even in the philosophical realm is a more sinnable position than indeterminism. So let’s not talk about freedom as if it is necessarily a blessing. Let’s talk about free agency in the sense of the Bible.

Now, our second objection we can dispense with more rapidly. Election is just fatalism. The Bible doctrine of election agrees with fatalism in one respect. That is that the events in question are certainly to come to pass in the future but election is utterly different from fatalism. Elections says events are determined by a personal wise and good father. Fatalism says events are determined by the law of universal causation. Election says that events are accomplished by directed means. Means directed by this loving Father. Fatalism says events are accomplished irrespective of freedom. Things roll along just like a machine. You and I can do nothing about it.

Election says the events of life lead to the best ends which is the glory of God, ultimately. Fatalism says events evolve with no end and no goal in view whatsoever. The difference between fatalism and the doctrine of foreordination or predestination as taught in the Bible is the difference between a man and a machine. It’s the difference between an activity which has as its originator a loving, kind, omnipotent God who knows what is absolutely best for his creation. Who moves in the affairs of men whom he has chosen by means chosen by him for their good to an ultimate goal that is for their ultimate good and for his ultimate glory. The fact that certainty exists is one of the blessings of it and not one curses of it.

Fatalism is not like the biblical teaching unless third election presents the sincere offer of salvation to the non-elect. It’s surprising you know that people should raise an objection like this if they thought at all they would realize that Bible doctrine of election does not imply that we know who the elect are. Who are the elect? Are they white Caucasian? Do they live in Texas? Do they have a stripe down their backs that

distinguishes them from others? No one knows who they elect are. This room may be filled with only elect people. It may not be filled with elect people. Only God knows that. No preacher of the gospel, no one whoever gives forth the word of God ever knows whether the person to whom they are speaking is elect until there is some response. And even then in the final analysis we shall never know absolutely. I’m still worried about two or three of you, you know. We’ll never know absolutely until we are in the presence of the Lord and we might be surprised even then. I think we are going to be surprised for the positive not for the negative myself. I think we’re going to look around and say my goodness I never thought she’d make it but here she is. [Laughter] And they are probably going to say the same thing for us.

Now, I think if we just remember that then what I’m going to say will be very clear and I can say it in just a few sentences. In the author of the gospel, God sets forth a salvation that is sufficient for all. He sets forth a gospel that is perfectly adapted for all. There is no person who can ever say before the judgment throne of God, the gospel was not sufficient for me. He could never say the gospel was not adapted to my particular needs. And it is sincerely awkward to all. The non-elect may come if they will. The elect will come. The decree is no barrier. The barrier is man’s sin. That’s the barrier. There is no man who says I wanted to come but I couldn’t. He’d never say that. He didn’t come because he didn’t want to come because he was in sin. That’s why he didn’t come. By the way, this objection would also apply to God’s foreknowledge as well as election because it’s just as certain.

Finally, this decree remember is a secret decree. It’s not known. I told some of you this story. I don’t know whether it’s true or not but it illustrates the point. About a young preacher who finally discovers the truth of election. And he discovered there are some who are elect and that there were some who are not elect. And his natural inclination, thinking as a man with a depraved mind, was I cannot offer the gospel because all are not elect. And so he went to an elderly preacher whom he respected and

he said he had discovered the doctrine of election and now he had discovered that he couldn’t preach the gospel to everybody because only certain ones were elect. And the old preacher said to him now don’t you worry about that. You go on preaching the gospel and if you happen to get someone to heaven that God didn’t elect that would be all right with God for he loves sinners. Now, that’s not very theological but it expresses the point and that is we do not know who the elect are.

So the idea that some are elect and some are not should not by any manner of means prevent a sincere offer of salvation to the non-elect. As a matter of fact, that is precisely what God does in the Bible. And I want you if you will to turn with me to Exodus chapter 3. And I want to show you that God does this very thing. He offers when he knows that his offer shall not be accepted. Exodus chapter 3, verse 18 and verse 19 Moses writes, “And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.” And so Moses is told by God to go to Pharaoh and to say, “the Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us and now let us go.” And then the very next verse, he says, “And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand.” So he tells Moses to tell Pharaoh to let them go when he knows that they will not let them go. It is perfectly all right for us to offer the gospel to all men knowing that not all shall respond.

Now, next or January the fifth election involves the injustice of electing only some. God is unjust because he has chosen only some. We’ll deal with that. Isn’t that interesting? Do you feel down deep within its kind of unfair that he should have only chosen some? Do you feel that way? See you’re still thinking with your depraved mind. You’re not going to trust yourself at all after tonight. Election discourages the efforts of the lost if they know some are elect and some are not then why bother? Why bother? If I’m elect I’ll get there, if I’m not elect I won’t so I’ll live as a flee. And it discourages

efforts for the lost. Election implies double predestination. If some are elect then some are predestined to perdition. We’ll discuss that January the fifth plus perhaps some other one or two also. Let’s bow together and pray. We have about twelve minutes intermission after the prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and Lord we know that we are in deep water. Our minds are depraved as a result of the fall. We thank thee for the freedom which thou hast given to us but we know it is limited. We know that we do not have the ability to turn to Thee and so we thank Thee that thou didst work for us. And Thou didst persuade us and cause us not only to turn to Thee but to enjoy and want to turn. We thank Thee that our salvation is not of the will of man, not of the will of the flesh but it is in God that Thou dost work in our hearts both the willing to do Thy good pleasure. And, Father, we are so glad it’s that way because Thou art a wise, omnipotent, loving, gracious Father who knows that which is best for us help us to trust Thee completely.

For Christ’s sake. Amen.