The Selection of Grace

**Scripture Reading**: Eph. 1:4-5, Rom. 9:11-12, 15-16, 11:5-6

Eph. 1:4 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,

1:5 Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Rom. 9:11 Though the children had not yet been born nor had done anything good or bad (that the purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works but of Him who calls),

9:12 It was said to her, “The greater shall serve the less”;

9:15 For to Moses He says, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”

9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

11:5 In the same way then at the present time also there has come into being a remnant according to the selection of grace.

11:6 But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.

I. God’s selection

Romans 11:5 says, “In the same way then at the present time also there has come into being a remnant according to the selection of grace.” Then what is the selection of grace? In society, selection is related to birth, upbringing, education, and success in the world. Divine selection is absolutely different. We were selected even before we were born, in fact, before the foundation of the world. Human selection depends upon what people are in themselves. Those who are good, promising, or successful are likely to be selected. God’s selection, on the contrary, does not depend upon what we are; it depends entirely upon God and His desire.

In chapter nine Paul used the case of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of God’s selection. Before they were born, God had told Rebecca, “The greater shall serve the less” (9:12). God’s choice was made before the children were born, before they had done anything good or bad. This was so that the “purpose of God according to selection might remain, not of works but of Him who calls” (v. 11). Nevertheless, when he was in the womb, Jacob was struggling to be born first. It was of God’s mercy that Jacob was not successful. If he had succeeded, he would not have received God’s selection.

In a very real sense, we all are Jacobs struggling to be first. From our very birth, we have had the concept that we must struggle in order to gain something for ourselves. Even though we may fail again and again, we keep on striving. We are just like Jacob, the supplanter, whom God predestined to be second but who still struggled to be first. Praise God for the restraining hand of His mercy that has kept us from succeeding in our endeavors! He restrains us because He had already selected us long before we were born.

II. Selection, predestination, and calling

Ephesians 1:4 and 5 prove that God’s selection and predestination took place in eternity past: “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Before the universe came into existence, God selected us and predestinated us unto sonship. Then at a certain point in our life, God came in to call us, and we were saved. Even though we may have had no intention of believing in the Lord Jesus, we came to believe in Him, because we had been selected and predestinated by God. This is the selection of grace in which God’s mercy is manifested. As Paul says in 9:16, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

III. The proof of God’s selection

Many of us do not even know why we became Christians in the first place. Some of us may even have tried to stop believing in the Lord, but we were not successful in doing so. On the one hand, it is wonderful to be a Christian; but on the other hand, it is extremely trying and difficult. We Christians are not only Jacobs, but also Jobs. Due to God’s selection, we had no choice except to become Christians. Now that we have believed into the Lord Jesus, we simply cannot escape from Him. This proves that we have been selected by God.

Within us there is something that causes us to believe in the Lord, whether we want to believe in Him or not. This comes from the selection of grace. We may want to get a “divorce” from the Lord, but He refuses to sign the certificate of divorce. God is not afraid of any attempt we might make to escape from Him. He knows that however hard we may try, we cannot get away. This is the strongest proof that we have been selected by God. How marvelous is the divine selection of grace!

We see God’s selection in a practical way in our preaching of the gospel. A number of unbelievers may attend the same meeting and hear the same message; however, only certain ones respond. This is difficult to explain. We can attribute it only to God’s selection, predestination, and calling.

I remember a story told about D. L. Moody. One day a student expressed the concern that through his preaching of the gospel someone could be saved who had not been selected by God. Moody told him not to be troubled, but to simply continue to preach the gospel. Furthermore, Moody said that he should allow anyone who is willing to believe to receive the Lord. Moody went on to say that over the entrance of heaven there will be written the words, “Whosoever will may come,” but that after a person passes through the entrance, he will see inscribed upon the inside of it these words: “Chosen from before the foundation of the world.”

IV. All a matter of God’s mercy

The gospel is wholly a matter of God’s sovereign mercy. Why is it that some believers are willing to bear their responsibility and that others are not? The answer lies in God’s mercy. In 9:15 Paul quotes the Lord’s words, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” Because of God’s mercy in His selection of grace, we responded to the gospel when others did not respond; we received a word about Christ as our life when others refused to receive it.

Our being here is altogether due to the mercy of God. We should have no trust in ourselves, and we should not think we are here because of anything that we are or that we have done. Furthermore, it is a mercy that we are willing to be separated from today’s evil age.

Our going on with the Lord is a matter not of our willing or running, but of God’s mercy. Our willing is of no avail, and our running is in vain. God’s mercy, however, works in a wonderful way. We are changeable, constantly fluctuating. It seems that, as far as we are concerned, our spiritual condition is like weather that is unstable. Hence, we need to see that the selection of grace does not depend on us, but depends on God’s selection of us before the world began. What we are experiencing today is related to God’s selection in eternity past. If we see this, we shall turn our eyes away from ourselves and from our circumstances and gaze steadfastly upon Him.

V. The gospel of grace

The gospel in which we serve God is a gospel of grace, not a gospel of works. As 11:6 says, “But if by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.” However, the fact that God’s selection is wholly a matter of His grace does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want. If this is our attitude, then we either have not been selected by God or we are backsliders from God’s selection. Oh, let us forget ourselves and our situation and keep our eyes upon the Lord. Again and again, let us say, “Lord, we praise You for Your selection of grace. O Lord, we worship You for Your mercy.” This is the gospel revealed in the book of Romans.

*References: Life Study of Romans, msg. 58.*