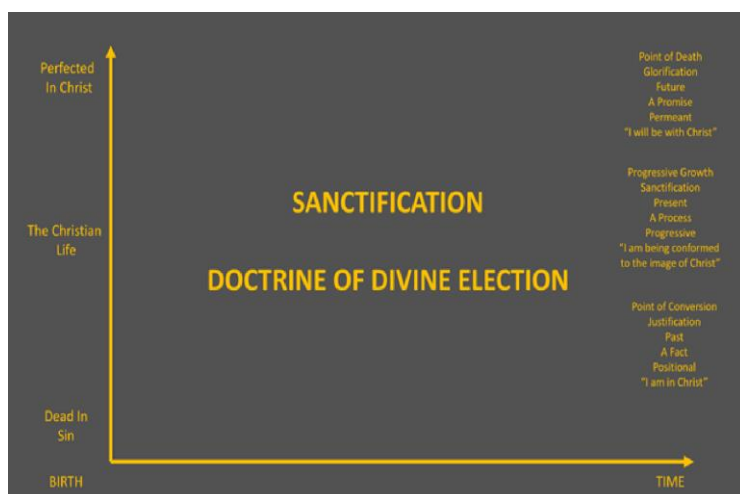




DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ELECTION

Romans 8 makes a monumental and very clear statement to that regard. when in Romans 8 the apostle Paul writes, "For whom he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son." That is, all whom God predestined will become conformed to the image of his Son in eternal glory. And thus "whom he predestined he called, and whom he called he justified, and whom he justified these he also glorified." And so, we said that the great undergirding foundational truth that secures our future is God's decree in eternity past. It is the fact that we are chosen for final salvation that makes our salvation secure.

Doctrine of Divine Election

Part 3

This is not a small controversy when you talk about the doctrine of election. There are many people who feel, as I noted in our original message, that this is a dangerous doctrine, that this turns God into a monster, that this is an almost blasphemous, that this is a kind of heresy. And yet no matter how much human reason, human preference might rage against this doctrine, it is inescapably taught in scripture. And we need to bow our knees to this great truth of divine election, and once we do it may become to us the most precious of all doctrines.

I understand what the Bible says about these matters of salvation. And I understand that the Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:4 that “God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” I also know that the Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” And I know that the Bible says we are commanded to preach the gospel to every creature. And I know that the Bible commands all men everywhere to repent and that God demands that all consider his Son, in whom he is well pleased, and hear him. And that the gospel is essentially a command.

We talk about it as a gift, we talk about it as an offer, but it is essentially a command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I also understand that the Bible teaches human choice and human volition. That the Bible says “choose this day whom you will serve.” I know that Jesus said, “Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” I know that he said, “Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.”

And Jesus posed the question, “Why will you die? You will not come to me,” he said, “that you might have life.” And I know that Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, “Though I would have often gathered you as a hen gathers her brood, you would not.” I know that God wept over a recalcitrant, rebellious and unbelieving Israel, and he wept through the eyes of Jeremiah, as recorded in Jeremiah chapter 13.

I also know that the Bible indicts all people as sinners, and all sinners as personally guilty of violating God's holy law and deserving of divine wrath and eternal punishment. And I know that the Bible indicates that all sinners have enough revelation to be responsible for their sin. Through creation in Romans 1 and through conscience in Romans 2, the sinner is given light, if which followed, leads to the truth. If they fail to follow it, they will perish under God's wrath.

Now, I understand all of that and so do you, and that is all in the scripture. But at the very same time without any contradiction, only in apparent difficulty in our minds, there is a mystery unfolded for us in scripture that tells us that no sinner is capable of understanding the truth. "The natural man understandeth not the things of God. They are incomprehensible to him. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to him." No sinner on his own is capable of repenting.

In fact, as Acts 11:18 says, the only way a sinner could ever repent is if God grants him repentance. And even believing is beyond the capability of human beings. John 1 says, "As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God." Believing does not come by the will of man, or the will of the flesh.

The Bible then says people are incapable of understanding the truth, the gospel truth. They are incapable of repenting. They are incapable of believing. So that the only way any sinner can be redeemed is by the work of God. God has to grant understanding, grant repentance, grant faith. God has to overpower spiritual death and give life, overpower spiritual blindness and give sight, overpower spiritual ignorance and give truth, overpower the pervasive love of sin and replace it with a desire for righteousness.

If anyone is ever saved, it is because God overrules all the normal natural inabilities. That's why we say salvation is all of God. It's not just all of grace, it's all of God. Now that is never apart from human will, it is never in violation of human will. The profound unsearchable reality is that no one would ever choose Christ if God had not first chosen him. We are saved and we have life because God freely chose to give it to us.

Let's start in John 6:64. Over these first two messages I gave you a lot of scripture to consider. Here's another one to add to your list. Verse 64. Jesus says, "Now there are some of you who do not believe, for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, as well as who it was who would betray him - " namely, Judas. Verse 65. "And he was saying. 'For this reason I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father.' "

I don't know how much more clearly that could be said. You can't come, you won't come, unless God grants you the understanding, the repentance and the faith. Now that is what we said in the first two messages, that salvation is a work of God. And that leaves us with a very, very important question to answer tonight, and it is this question: Why did God do this? Why did he make this choice? Why did God choose to rescue sinners from his just judgment?

And the answer really is staggering. To understand why God did this, I want to help you work through some very, very powerful texts of scripture. Let's start in Titus chapter 1. Titus chapter 1. And I want you to get the really big picture of this glorious doctrine of election. In the beginning of Titus, Paul introduces himself, and he introduces himself in ways which are essential to his calling. He is "a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ." In the large sense, he serves God. In the more specific sense, he serves God as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, in discharging his service to God and his apostleship in behalf of Jesus Christ, there are a number of elements in his ministry. First of all, he says, "For the faith of those chosen by God," or as some translations put it, "for the faith of the elect of God." So the first thing that Paul says is God has called me into his service.

And by the way, Paul's conversion and call is a picture of the conversion of every sinner. He is on the way to Damascus. His heart is filled with hatred for Christ. He's headed to persecute more believers. He stopped in his tracks and sovereignly saved by God. He then becomes "a servant of God and apostle of Christ" and his first task is "for the faith of the elect." That is to say it is to bring the gospel to the elect so that they can hear it and believe.

Now since Paul doesn't know who the elect are, since there is no way to identify them, since the decree of God and his sovereign election is secret and hidden, Paul then preaches the gospel everywhere he goes, knowing that the Lord will use him to bring the gospel to the elect who will believe. This is what evangelism is, and this was the first aspect of Paul's ministry. It's the ministry of evangelism. You bring the gospel so the elect can hear it and believe.

And then there's a second aspect to his ministry. It starts out with evangelism and moves toward edification. He says, not only is he called by God to represent Jesus Christ in bringing the truth to the elect so they can hear it and believe, but to those who believe he brings "the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." That's the second aspect. Once people have believed they need to be taught the truth so they can grow in Christ's likeness. So, you could say the first aspect of his ministry was salvation, the second is sanctification. He says, "I preach the gospel so that elect can hear it and believe, and then I teach the Word of God so that those who believe can learn the truth, which produces godliness."

There's a third aspect of ministry, and it's true for him and for all of us, verse 2. "In the hope of eternal life." The third aspect is that element of encouragement and consolation and hope that looks at future glory. So summing it up, he says, "First of all, I preach the gospel so the elect can hear it and believe. Then I teach the Word so that those who believe can grow in the knowledge of the truth into godliness. And then, I tell them about the eternal life to come so that they can live in hope, and hope becomes their great comfort."

So there is, in his ministry, an aspect of salvation, an aspect of sanctification, an aspect of glorification. And we all have that responsibility. I mean, that's what we all do, we bring the gospel and then those who believe we instruct that they may grow. And then we fill their minds with the hope of what is to come in the glorious inheritance that awaits us in the future. But verse 2 is where I want you to focus, Titus 1:2.

"All of this - " he says. "All of this, from justification through sanctification to glorification, all of this comes from God who cannot lie and who promised it - " and the NAS says, " - long ages ago." The Greek says, "Before time began." Before time began. Before time began, God promised that he would save, and sanctify, and glorify believers.

Now the question is before time began to whom did he make this promise? He certainly didn't promise it to any human being because there weren't any. Before time began is before day one of creation. He certainly didn't promise this to angels because there are no saved angels, there are holy angels who never fall, who never fell, and there are fallen angels who are never redeemed, but are headed for a lake of fire prepared for them. There's never been the salvation of any angels, so he didn't make any promise about salvation and sanctification and glorification to angels, and he didn't make it to people because there weren't any people. In fact, it's very likely that when this promise was made there weren't any angels, either, because the angels seemed to be created at around the time everything else was created.

Then, who in the world is he making a promise to? Well, it has to be an inter-trinitarian promise. It has to be God making a promise within the Trinity. And to whom then is he making the promise? Look with me at Paul's second letter to Timothy and let's follow the path of this. 2 Timothy chapter 1:9. Verse 8 ends with a reference to God, and then verse 9 says, referring to God, "Who saved us and called us with a holy calling not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus - " and here's the exact same Greek phrase as in Titus 1:2 " - before time began."

I don't know why the translators in Titus 1:2 translated it "long ages ago," and here the very same phrase they translate "from all eternity." What it means is "before time began." "Before there was time, God promised to save sinners and sanctify them and glorify them." The question is, to whom did he make the promise? He didn't make it to the sinners. They weren't there. To whom did he make it?

Well, verse 9 says, "It was granted in Christ Jesus," and I will tell you, right there is the key. The Father made a promise to the Son. The whole of salvation comes from God. It is all about his own purpose and it is granted on behalf of Christ. So, what you have, then, to understand this great doctrine of election is this. The Father, at some point in eternity past, says to the Son, "I am going to redeem sinners and I'm going to do it for you. I'm going to do it for you."

Why would God do that? Because he loves the Son and the 17th chapter of John, as we'll see later, the Son celebrates the mutual love that he has with the Father, and love gives, and the

Father determines in his eternal love within the Trinity that he will express his love for the Son by giving the Son a gift, and that gift, essentially, is going to be a redeemed humanity. If you will, he gives his Son a bride.

In the ancient world, fathers chose the brides for their sons. That's the way it was done. Nobody chose for themselves. That was the father's responsibility. And here you have the divine pattern as God determines that he will choose a bride for his Son. It's a way that the Father could express his love to his Son. It's a way he determined to do it, that he would give to his Son a redeemed humanity.

Follow that thought to the 6th chapter of John, a section of scripture that we refer to often in our studies in the Word of God because it's so foundational. In John 6:37. This is critical. "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." This is where it has to be understood. Every saved person is a gift from the Father to the Son. The Father determined in eternity past that he would give to the Son a bride, that he would give to the Son a redeemed humanity. The Bible tells us that he actually wrote their names down in the Lamb's Book of Life knowing that even before the foundation of the world, the Lamb would have to be slain to pay the price for that redemption.

There was always a price paid for a bride, paid to the father by the one who took the bride. In this case, the Father had to give up his own Son, the Son had to give up his own life to pay the price to purchase his bride. Every saved individual is a part of that bride. Even the Old Testament saints are engulfed into the bride and take up residence in the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, becomes the capital city of eternity, the bridal city. The whole of redemptive history is about the Father pursuing a bride for his Son. And the Father determined before the foundation of the world who the bride would be and he wrote down the names so that every person who comes to Christ is given to Christ by the Father. It's just a staggering and glorious truth.

In fact, look at verse 44. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." You can't come. You can't understand. You can't repent. You can't believe. It's just what we read in the same chapter, verses 64 and 65. "I've said to you, no one can come to me unless it's been granted him from the Father." This is a divine grant.

So how is it that people are saved? They are chosen. Their names are written down in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. Every one of them is a personal gift from the Father to the Son. And then, back to verse 37, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." If you're given, you will come. This is what theologians through the centuries have called "irresistible grace." If you are chosen, if you are a gift from the Father to the Son, you will come.

You will be given life, and understanding, and repentance and faith. And verse 37 says, "The one who comes to me, I will certainly not cast out." Why? Because there's something inherently valuable in the sinner? No. This is one of the evangelical illusions today, that we're so wonderful God can't resist us. He just loves us to pieces because of what we are. It isn't that at all. The value is not in the gift. The value is in the giver of the gift. It's because the Son so perfectly loves the Father that whatever the Father gives the Son takes on infinite value because of the giver, not the gift.

I mean, I think we understand that in the natural sense. Gifts given to us by people that we love take on a value far beyond their inherent value sitting on a shelf. It isn't that there's anything particularly glorious or wonderful about us, it is that because we have been given to the Son by the Father we become precious to the Son. And he would never reject a gift from his Father.

And then verse 39, "This is the will of him who sent me, that of all that he has given me, I lose none - " I lose none, " - but raise it up on the last day." Verse 40. "This is the will of My Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him - " because the Father allows him to do that, empowers him to do that, everyone who does that " - will have eternal life and I myself will raise him up on the last day."

Are you beginning to understand? The Father chooses a bride, writes the name down. In time, as history unfolds, those whom the Father has chosen are given to the Son. As they repent and believe, the Son receives them. The Son does not reject them. The Son never loses any of them, but raises them up on the last day. And it is not based upon value that's inherent in us. We become precious because the Son cherishes the gifts of his Father.

This same language comes to us again in the 17th chapter of John. You might want to turn to it. Some have called this chapter the Holy of Holies of scripture. Here you get deep into the communion within the Trinity between the Father and the Son. In John 17, Jesus is talking to the Father about us, talking to the Father about His bride, those that the Father has given.

Verse 9. “I ask on their behalf,” he says, “I do not ask on behalf of the world, - ” I’m not talking about the world, “But of those whom thou hast given me for they are thine.” And in that sense, the elect have been God’s since they were chosen. They’ve always belonged to him. And he gives them as gifts of love to the Son. And the Son says I’m asking about them. I’m praying for them. I’m not praying on behalf of the world, but of those whom thou hast given me.

Verse 11. He anticipates leaving, getting near the cross. And he says, “I’m no more in the world, the time is coming when I’ll be gone, yet they are in the world and I come to thee, holy Father - ” now listen to this “ - keep them in thine name, the name which thou hast given me that they may be one even as we are.” Now this is really a very deep moment in this prayer of Jesus. “I’m about to leave,” he says, “and they’re going to be here and I’m coming to you and I’m asking you, Father, to keep them. I’ve kept them up to now. Things are going to change. And I want you to keep them.”

Verse 12, he says, “While I was with them, I was keeping them in thy name - ” here it is again, “ - which thou hast given me and I guarded them and not one of them perished,” except, of course, Judas, who never was for real.

You see, Jesus says, “I kept them, Father, I kept them because you gave them to me.” I think Jesus is feeling the separation that’s going to come. And he’s saying, “Father, there’s going to be a time here when I’m not going to be able to keep them. Father, could you keep them for that time that I can’t keep them, and when I come back to you, would you keep them then, too?”

And in that moment when Jesus was separated from his Father, God stepped in and kept his own. And since Christ ascended to glory, he sent the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee, the down payment, the one who keeps us, who seals us.

Why all of this? Because we are precious. Why are we precious? Not because we're inherently any better than anybody else, but because we've been given to the Son as gifts of love from the Father. Again, in verse 24, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." I want them to see my glory. Father, I want to have them come to the great wedding, and I want you to keep them. He will lose none. The Father will lose none. The Spirit seals us unto eternal redemption.

What is the purpose of all of this? Well the Father has chosen to give to the Son a bride. For what reason? To love the Son forever, to serve the Son forever, to praise the Son forever, to glorify the Son forever. I mean, just think about it, I mean, from a very earthy analogy standpoint, it would be like saying to your wife, men, "I just love you so much, I just don't know how to express that love, and so what I've done is I've collected a huge group of people, and they're going to spend all their time and all their energy following you wherever you go, serving you, praising you. They're going to be your own private hallelujah chorus, just extolling your virtues, doing everything you desire them to do. And not only that, but they're going to reflect your glory, they're going to be as much like you as possible, they're going to be a whole hallelujah chorus of clones. We're just going to radiate everything that's beautiful about you."

You say, "That is wacky." Sure. Because we can't conceive of any human being deserving that kind of praise. But Christ does and in the mind of the Father, he is worthy of a redeemed humanity who will fill eternal heavens with praise and honor given to the Son. They will be, as Revelation 4 and 5 pictures them, gathered around the throne of God crying out forever and ever, "Worthy is the Lamb. Worthy is the Lamb." And they will serve Christ and more than that, they will even be made like him for they shall see him as he is. They will have a body like unto his resurrection body, Philippians 3:20-21 says.

As much as glorified humanity can be like deity incarnate, we'll be like Christ. This is the way that one must understand election. This is what Paul calls in Philippians 3 the prize of the upward call, the prize of being called up is to be made like Christ. Being made like Christ so that we can reflect His glory, so that he's the *protokos*, the premier one among many brethren, that is many who are made like him. We're going to bear His image.

Redemptive history ends when the last name is redeemed. It's over. And in the final ending, the Father will have gathered the bride in total and presented the bride to his Son. And it will be at that great final glorious location, the New Jerusalem, that is adorned as a bride for her husband. It will eternally be the city of the bride. And all the saints of all the ages will make up that redeemed humanity and all we'll ever do forever, and ever, and ever, and ever is honor the Lord Jesus Christ. And that will satisfy the Father, who has perfect love for the Son.

Let me show you another remarkable feature of this. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Corinthians 15. There's a lot about consummation here, the end of everything, but verse 25 talks about how Christ is going to reign and finally put all his enemies under his feet. This is looking at the last ending of everything. And verse 26, the abolishing of death which comes at the very end of this universe, as we know it.

And in the final ending, verse 27 says, "Everything is in subjection under his feet." That's where the Father takes the bride and gives the bride to the Son. Everything is there. Everything is subject to him, which means all redeemed humanity. We'll all be there. The story of redemption will be complete. This earth and universe as we know it will be dissolved like elements melting in fervent heat, Peter says. It will be all over, human history. And the bride will be complete and given to the Son, everything put in subjection to him.

And then look at verse 28, really amazing. "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him that God may be all in all." Boy, that is a staggering look into the glory of our future.

What is it saying? It's saying this, that when the Father gives the Son the bride, when everything is done and all redemption is over, and all the redeemed are gathered, and the Father has given the Son the bride, the Son in an act of reciprocal love gives the bride and himself back to the Father so that God is all in all.

If you have some superficial, shallow comprehension of salvation, this has taken you places your mind has never gone. We are being saved, beloved, because we are caught up in a glorious, divine expression of love between the Father and the Son. It is way beyond us. We

are, in a sense, saved not as ends in ourselves, but as a means to an end. We don't deserve to be saved. Hell is not unjust. Hell is just. Eternal punishment is just.

But God is merciful to us, not because of some value which we possess, but because he so values his Son as to give to his Son a redeemed humanity who will adore him forever for saving them, adding a dimension of adoration and praise that angels can't give, and the Son having received his bride will give himself and his bride back to the Father in a reciprocal act of love.

This is where it all finally ends, and this is what Paul must have had in mind when he wrote to the Galatians and said, "I have pain until Christ is fully formed in you." "I want to present you," he said to the Corinthians, "as a chaste virgin to Christ." He understood this. This doctrine of election is not some philosophical thing. It's not some abstraction. It is the heart and soul of all redemption. And you are a Christian because the Father chose you, the Father wrote your name down, the Father drew you, you therefore came, the Son received you, and the Son will not lose you, and the Son will raise you, and the Father will glorify you because that's what he determined to do at the beginning. You are precious because of what it is that you have been chosen to do throughout all eternity.

The price - the Father said to the Son, "There is a price for your bride," and it was a profound price. He bore in his own body our sins on the cross. We were redeemed, not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood, the blood of Christ, like a lamb spotless and unblemished. He who was rich, the Son, rich in heavenly riches became poor that we through his poverty might become rich.

You know, when you think about the doctrine of election from that viewpoint, it is just so staggering. The Father makes the Son sin to pay the price for an unworthy bride. We're very little different than Hosea's wife who was a prostitute, and Hosea went into the marketplace and paid the price to buy her back from her prostitution. And then he set his love on her as if she were a virgin, it says. We are a precious bride, bought with the impoverishing of the Son and through his own death. We are precious now because we have been chosen by the Father for the Son.

Let me tell you in closing how you ought to think about the doctrine of election. Election is pride crushing. That's the first thing I want you to think about. It just produces nothing but humility. It is not that you believe because you were smarter than anyone else, or better than anybody else, or wiser than anybody else. It is that you were chosen. Spurgeon called this doctrine the most stripping doctrine in all the world. He said, "I know nothing, nothing again that is more humbling than this doctrine of election." He said, "I have sometimes fallen prostrate before it when endeavoring to understand it, but when I came near it and the one thought possessed me, God has chosen me from the beginning unto salvation, I was staggered by that mighty thought and from the dizzy elevation down came my soul, prostrate and broken, saying, Lord I am nothing, I am less than nothing, why me, why me?"

That, my dear friend, that crushing of all pride is at the very heart of worship, isn't it? On the other hand, this doctrine is God-exalting. It gives all the glory to God. This doctrine declares that understanding of the truth, belief in the truth, repentance from sin, and the power for obedience to the gospel all comes from God, not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to thy name give glory.

And I think thirdly, this doctrine is not only pride crushing and God exalting, it is joy producing. In fact, it plants in your heart a sort of overwhelming joy. It is the mystery of it that contributes to the joy. It is the hopelessness of our own abilities that strengthens that joy. I mean, I just continue to be floored with joy.

Psalms 65:4 says, "Blessed is the man whom you choose and cause to approach you." If the Lord hadn't chosen us, we'd be like Sodom, destroyed. Rather than sit around and question the rational sentiments that sometimes get attached to this doctrine, celebrate it. You have been loved by God with an everlasting love.

Fourthly, it is a privilege-granting truth. It grants to us unspeakable benefits and benefits that we could never earn. "We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ."

Not only that, fifthly, it is a holiness-producing doctrine. I don't know about you but I can't think of anything more motivating to live a godly life than gratitude for this holy calling. I really believe to understand the doctrine of election is to produce the most significant

motivation for holy living. Spurgeon said again, “Nothing. Nothing under the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit can make a Christian more holy than the thought that he’s chosen.” Shall I sin after God has chosen me? Shall I transgress against such love? Shall I go astray against such mercy? Shall I spurn such eternal kindness? My God, since you have chosen me, I will love you, I will live for you, I will give myself to you forever.

And number six, it is strength giving. Frankly it makes me at peace with every situation. I’m chosen. And Philippians 1:6 says, “Who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ.” And if the Father draws you, and you come, and you believe, and the Son receives you, and he never loses you, but raises you at the last day, therein is great encouragement, great strength no matter what the circumstances of life.

There is a certain boldness, a certain confidence, a certain firmness, a strength, a fearlessness, if you will, that belongs to those who understand they are chosen. And that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance. This is the blessedness of this doctrine. It is pride crushing, God exalting, joy producing, privilege granting, holiness promoting and strength giving.

And dare we ignore such a doctrine? If we ignore it, or deny it, or reject it, we steal the glory from God. We must glorify God as our redeemer. We must glorify God as the giver of life, and understanding, and repentance, and faith of which we are incapable. If we deny this doctrine, then we are left with a misunderstanding of our own weakness, and we lose the entire sense of the scheme of all redemptive history.

And somebody at this point is going to say, “Well, how do you know if you’re elect?” Do you believe the gospel? Have you repented of sin? Do you desire to obey the Lord? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? That’s the proof because that’s not possible apart from the mighty sovereign work of God.

We could say a lot more about the doctrine of election, but we’re working our way through some very important things. We started with perseverance, that our salvation is eternal. And I told you that it has to be eternal because it’s based on election. So then we backed into the doctrine of election.

Now we're going to back into another doctrine, the doctrine of human depravity, the reason that you couldn't be saved unless God chose to save you is because you're incapable of believing. And that introduces us to the doctrine of depravity.

People who don't understand preservation, perseverance, or eternal security, don't understand it because they don't understand the doctrine of election. People who reject the doctrine of election and believe the sinner chooses to believe on his own don't understand the doctrine of depravity. If you're going to believe that sinners can be saved on their own, then it's not just a work of God, it's something sinners do, then you don't understand the nature of sin. So, next Sunday night we're going to continue in our backwards trip through doctrine to the doctrine of depravity.