

## Election in Romans 8-11<sup>1</sup>

### I. Definitions of Some Terms

Ask: What do you understand by the term “election”?<sup>2</sup>

- Unconditional election is the doctrine that describes the actions and motives of God in eternity past where He predestined some people to receive salvation, the elect, and the rest He left to continue in their sins and receive the just punishment for their transgressions against Him and His Law. God made these choices according to His own purposes apart from any conditions or qualities related to those persons.
- Conditional election is the counter-view to unconditional election, and the belief that God chooses for eternal salvation those whom He foresees will have faith in Christ through an act of human free will.
- Corporate election refers to the view that salvation is based on God choosing a people whom He destines to be His own.
- Predestination is the doctrine that all events have been willed by God, usually with reference to the eventual fate of the individual soul.

### II. Overview of Romans

Paul writes to address a divisive issue in the church in Rome. This has to do with the arrogance of the Gentile believers towards their Jewish counterparts in church. This “superior” mentality is probably due to the fact that the Jews have first rejected Christ, resulting in the Gospel being preached to and embraced by the Gentiles who are now larger numerically in the Roman church.

In Chap 1-8, Paul has to first set straight his theology of salvation with the believers in Rome because they are not his “spiritual children” as he is not the founder of the church there.

After stating his theology, Paul writes to settle the divisive issue in Chap 9-11. The “Israel” that he refers to in these three chapters is very much the literal nation of Israel as in OT times.

- Chap 1-6: Paul’s teaching of the Gospel
- Chap 7: Paul’s personal struggles in his spiritual life (flesh vs. Spirit)
- Chap 8: Paul’s declaration that there is no condemnation in Christ (The Lord does not condemn us for struggling in our trials and testing;

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<sup>1</sup> NIV

<sup>2</sup> The word “elect” or “election” appears 14 times in the NT: Matt 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Rom 9:11; 11:7, 28; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:10.

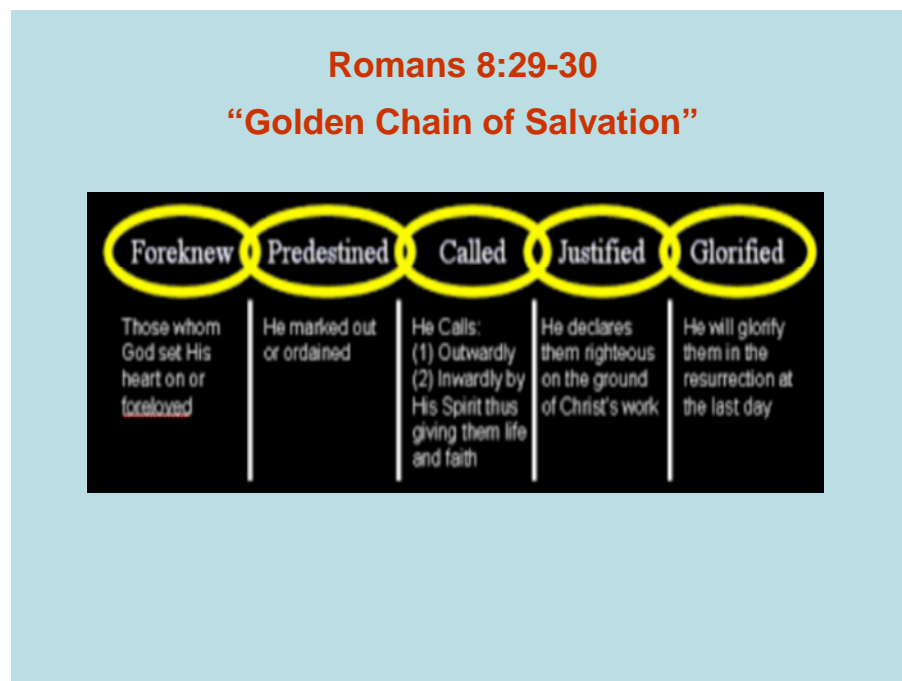
victory over our struggles will come in and through Christ, and in His time)

- Chap 9-11: Paul's theology of Israel's restoration, NOT the Church replacing Israel in God's final redemptive acts (i.e. Paul's theology of the end times is not Replacement Theology)
  - Chapter 9: Israel's past—elected, chosen by God to reveal God's person and plan to the world.
  - Chapter 10: Israel's present—rejection of Messiah that results in God setting aside His people, the Jews.
  - Chapter 11: Israel's future—one day all Israel will be saved, restored, reunited in the people of God.
- Chap 12ff: "Housekeeping" issues in living as believers of Christ

### III. Romans 8.29-30: Explaining the "Golden Chain of Salvation"

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Ask: What do you understand by these two verses, OR what concerns do you have about these two verses?



The "golden chain" in Rom 8:29-30 begins with the foreknowledge of God and ends with glorification. All those whom God foreknew are also those who arrive at glorification. That is, the group that is identified by "those" in Romans 8:29 is the same group that reaches glorification in Romans 8:30.

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If God has eternal divine foreknowledge of ALL people, note what happens when we apply this foreknowledge to Romans 8:29-30.

All those whom God foreknew (that means everybody) are also those who are predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Understanding God's foreknowledge in Romans 8:29-30 as encompassing ALL people will lead to the inevitable conclusion that ALL people will be glorified. But we know this is not true in real life. Now, if only a certain group of people will be glorified, then this leads us backward through the "golden chain" to see that God's foreknowledge has reference to only a certain group of people.

In other words, we must either say that this verse teaches universalism (i.e. ALL will be glorified), or that we have misunderstood Paul if we hold to this conclusion.

It is likely that Paul is using the term "know" in the customary Semitic sense of affection rather than in a merely cognitive sense. To "know" someone is to love that one. So to "foreknow" someone means to love that one ahead of time. Three chapters later, Paul refers to Israel as "God's people whom he foreknew" (Rom 11:2). If this is in fact its meaning in 8:29, then Paul is simply claiming that God loved those in the church before he called them just as he loved the nation of Israel before he called them.

Note that when Paul introduces the idea of God's calling in Romans 8:28, he says that this calling is "according to His purpose". And what is God's purpose? In Romans 8:29, Paul states that those whom God foreknew, He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Since only those who are called are also justified, Paul cannot be referring to a call to people in general to respond to the gospel. Rather, it is a calling of God to believers (i.e. those in the church) to serve Him and to be conformed to Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8:29-30, Paul's emphasis is on God's part in the plan of salvation, but this does not mean that mankind has no role.

In the overall scheme of redemption, God alone is the one who foreknows what He will do, takes steps to make sure it happens, calls believers to a greater purpose in service to Him, justifies those who believe, and glorifies for eternity those who have been justified.

In Romans 8:29-30, Paul is saying that God decided in eternity past to make sure that everyone and anyone who joins His family by faith will finally and ultimately be brought into conformity to Jesus Christ at their glorification.

Foreknowledge in Romans 8:29-30 is not God's plan from all eternity about whom to give eternal life. It is simply God's plan about what to do with those who have believed.

Paul's intention in Romans 8:29-30 in the context of Romans 8 can be summarized below:

- Paul is writing to Christians who are facing severe testing and trials as a result of their faith in Jesus (Romans 8:17-18).
- Paul wants to encourage his readers by telling them that the suffering they face will result in glory, and that absolutely nothing can separate them from God's love or God's purpose in their lives (Romans 8:31-39).
- Paul's point is that God determined from eternity past to bring believers to glorification despite their many struggles. He reassures Christians that no matter what happens to them, God is with them, and just as He has had them in mind since before the foundation of the world, He will not abandon them to the trials and testing they are facing.
- God predetermined a destiny for His people in full knowledge of what they were, what they would be without His intervention, and most significantly, what they would become as a result of His grace on their behalf.
- God set the plan of redemption in place, and He will bring it to completion. He loves His people and will love them to the very end. Who then can condemn them if God is for them? Jesus could. But rather than condemn them, Jesus intercedes for them! Paul is here describing in great detail the height, breadth, width, and depth of God's love for His people.
- Thus, Paul is not so much concerned with laying down a sequential order of God's plan of salvation here. Rather, he is here encouraging and reassuring those called into the family of God's people—that God who has begun the work of redemption in them will surely bring it to glorious completion in spite of difficult circumstances.

#### **IV. Implications of Election**

1. Election does not mean that God merely knew who would believe and on that basis elected them. God would then not be choosing us; rather, we would be choosing Him.
2. Election does not obliterate human responsibility. Each person is held responsible before Almighty God as to what they will do with Jesus Christ.
3. Election is necessary because we are totally depraved sinners. In other words, we would not choose God unless He first chose us.
4. The process of election, as worked out in our own lives, does not violate our will. It is not as if God bullies you into submission to do His will. Rather, once our eyes have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, we see clearly what God has done for us and will freely choose Him in response.

Free will is the ability to make choices ACCORDING TO OUR DESIRES. In other words, we cannot exercise free will from a neutral position, i.e. without any prior inclination. To do so is to choose without a reason or preference. It is irrational. True free will is a kind of self-determination, not coercion from an external force.

Jesus says in John 6:44: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.” The word “can” means “ability and not permission”; the word “draws” means “to woo to the point of persuading, not forcing” (e.g. I wooed my girl friend in our courting days so that when she finally agreed to marry me, she chose so willingly because she was persuaded and not forced by my wooing). So, Jesus is saying that man is powerless to come to Him on his own without the divine help of the Father. Similarly, when we are so persuaded by the Holy Spirit to choose Christ, our free will is not violated. In fact, we become “born again” at that point and are therefore able to confess Christ as Lord and Saviour.

5. The means of election is always through human agency. That is, God uses other believers to communicate the gospel to the lost. Therefore, we cannot excuse ourselves from sharing the gospel by saying, “If he’s elect, God’s going to save him anyway. He doesn’t need me to do the job.” It’s true that God doesn’t need any of us to do His will, but it is equally true that God uses those who are willing to obey Him. Consequently, the doctrine of election should motivate us to share the gospel because we want to be used by God to do His will.

The key reason is simply because Scripture has exhorted us to evangelize (Rom 10:13-15): “... ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

You and I are not God. So, we don’t know who will be saved and who will not be. But our call is not to play God and judge who will be saved and who will not be. Rather, our call is to share the Good News with as many people as the Lord is leading us to do so while time is with them and with us.

6. Election doesn’t mean that God is unjust or unfair. Many would like to believe that “all men are generally good and innocent, and deserving of God’s goodness and mercy”. But the Bible stresses that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). So, in God’s view, we actually deserve His judgment and not His mercy. In other words, we cannot say, “God is unrighteous to judge people with His injustice and unfairness.” Rather, we should say, “God is gracious and merciful to save some when all are deserving of His judgment.” Those who are saved would have received God’s grace and mercy, and those who are not would have received their justified

judgment. All would have received grace, mercy or justice. None would have received injustice or unfairness.

7. Election is not just to salvation, but to sanctification and glorification (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8:28-30). In other words, those whom God has chosen are chosen not just to be saved, but also to be sanctified—i.e. not merely to like (verb) Christ, but to be **like** (preposition) Christ.

## **V. Romans 9: God's Sovereignty and Election in Salvation**

1. Election Defended (9:14-24): In these verses, Paul kind of envisages two objections to what he has taught about election (vv. 14, 19). The first is "It isn't just!" and the second is "It isn't my fault!"

- 1.1 It Isn't Just (vv. 14-18). Objection: "Do you mean to tell me that if God has chosen me to be saved I will be saved in spite of myself, and that if God has not chosen me, there is no hope for my salvation? That isn't just at all!"

The problem is that the objection is based on the point of justice (v. 14), while Paul is speaking of mercy. Justice speaks of men getting what is rightfully theirs. The justice of God demands death for every person for "there is none righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10). So, if we demand that God be just and just alone, then every soul would be condemned.

Election has nothing to do with justice, but it is a matter of God's mercy and grace. Mercy holds back punishment which is rightfully deserved. Grace goes even beyond mercy in that it hands out that which is completely undeserved. Any man whom God chooses to save is a man who deserves to die, for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The penalty which should be paid by the elect sinner has been paid by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. In addition to this, this sinner is declared righteous in the Person of Jesus Christ, and he is made a son of God and a co-heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17). This is grace!

We do not deserve the grace of God, and we dare not call God unjust because He has withheld His grace from some and bestowed it upon others. God is absolutely free to bestow His grace on whoever He chooses.

Paul illustrates this point by contrasting God's work in the lives of two men who were contemporaries of each other—Moses and Pharaoh. To Moses, God exercised mercy and grace, and towards Pharaoh, God exercised His justice. Interestingly, God used both men to further His purposes. God raised up Moses to

be a deliverer of His people. God raised up Pharaoh to display His power and to proclaim His glory (Romans 9:17).

To press this point further, the hardening of Pharaoh was an act of grace so far as the Jews were concerned, for it provided the occasion of their release. All Moses had asked for initially was to let the people of Israel go into the wilderness for a time to worship God (Exodus 5:1). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart occasioned the ten plagues, which more than answered the challenge of Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?" - Exodus 5:2.

- 1.2 It Isn't My Fault (vv. 18-24). The case of Pharaoh raises another objection. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that He accomplished His purposes, if God is truly sovereign and His will is inevitable, then how can He blame us for our rebellion?

It is at this point that Paul figuratively places his hand over the mouth of the objector, reminds him of who he is, and more important, WHO he is objecting to. God is the potter; we are the clay. God is just in disposing of us just as He wills. We can be either a Moses or a Pharaoh. As a Moses, we are the recipients of God's grace, and we are vessels which God will employ to demonstrate His mercy. If we rebel, we will be used as Pharaoh, and by our hardening we will be vessels by which God will reveal His wrath on sin. Either way, God is free to dispose of us and we will bring glory to Him. But what a difference for us if we stand with God!

Paul reminds the larger group of Gentile believers in Romans 9:22-24 that just as God had chosen to bestow His spiritual blessings on the nation Israel, He is now similarly blessing the Gentiles.

2. God's Word Is Not Being Frustrated, But Fulfilled (9:25-29): Paul now concludes this section by reminding his readers that both the hardening of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles was actually foretold in the Old Testament. The point is not that the Scriptures have been frustrated by Israel's unbelief, but that they have been fulfilled.

- 2.1 Salvation of Gentiles Foretold (vv. 25-26). Paul here quotes the prophet Hosea: "I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,' and her who was not beloved, 'beloved.' And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' There they shall be called sons of the Living God" (Romans 9:25, 26; Hosea 1:10; 2:23).

Hosea was the prophet whose adulterous wife was a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Because of this, God put them aside so that they were no longer His people. But God also promised that after their chastening, He would once again draw them to Himself and call them His people.

Technically, Hosea's message was about God's relationship with Israel. But Paul sees a principle in Hosea's words. This principle has to do with God calling to Himself a people who were not His own (like unfaithful Israel who were "disowned" by God). Paul applies this principle to the salvation of Gentiles who were once enemies of God in their spiritual idolatry (just as Israel had antagonized God in her spiritual unfaithfulness).

- 2.2 A Remnant in Israel Promised (vv. 27-29). In verses 27-29, Paul turns to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:9; 10:22, 23) to show that God's judgment demanded punishment on unfaithful Israel. But in this message of punishment was a ray of hope—God promised to preserve a remnant, and in this remnant rested Israel's hopes for future blessing.<sup>3</sup>

Israel is God's chosen people (His elect), but the nation will not be delivered unless and until the people respond to Him like Abraham, the Hebrew forefather of faith. It is not based on ethnicity, but on believing and receiving the God-sent Messiah; entering into a covenantal relationship to recognize God as their God and themselves as His people.

## **VI. Romans 11: Israel's Election and Its End-Time Significance**

### **1. Did God Reject Israel? (11:1-10)**

The answers are—"By no means!" (v. 1); "God did not reject his people" (v. 2).

Paul says, "Look at me. I'm a Jew that has embraced Jesus. If God had permanently cast off the entire nation, no Jew could be saved." Yet, Paul had been called by God, converted by faith to Christianity (Acts 9). Paul shares the story of Elijah—concludes that God has always had a remnant among the Jews. It is the same today—many Messianic churches exist in Jerusalem today. The existence today of Jews who have received Jesus as Messiah is evidence that God still has a plan for the Jewish people.

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<sup>3</sup> The context of Isaiah's prophecy was that of the apostasy of the northern kingdom of Israel and the judgment of God through the Assyrians. Although God's judgment was devastating, there was the promise of the preservation of a small remnant, without which Israel's hopes would have been destroyed.



## 2. What is the Purpose of Israel's Transgression? (11:11-24)

### 2.1 The Three-Fold Purpose of God:

- i. Salvation would come to Gentiles (v. 11b). Study Paul's missionary journeys in Acts, you see a pattern: Paul would go to the synagogues, Jews first, preach Christ, a few believed, but more often he was kicked out, turned to the Gentiles who believed, started churches. God used Jewish rejection as opportunities to reach out to the Gentiles directly.
- ii. Gentile faith would move the Jews to jealousy (v. 11b). The purpose of the Gentile church was to provoke the Jews to seek their Messiah.
- iii. One day Israel's fullness will bring greater riches to the entire world (v. 12). Greater blessings would await the world when the Jews would start to accept Christ as their Messiah. Today, there is a significant number of Messianic Jews since the 1960s—it is the beginning of the "fullness" to come; the beginning of the prophesied Jewish restoration as God's people in His redemptive plan for the world.

### 2.2 The Two Olive Trees (vv. 16-24)

Paul uses the allegory of two olive trees—the cultivated one and the wild one. The branches broken off from the cultivated tree represent unbelieving Jews who have been temporarily discarded. The grafted-in branches from the wild tree to the cultivated tree are the believing Gentiles. Gentiles are not to become prideful, arrogant or prejudiced against the Jews, for the Jews would always be God's chosen people (vv. 28, 29). There should be no room in the church of Jesus Christ for Gentile pride or any feelings of superiority to the Jewish people. No room in the Christian life for any feelings other than love, concern for the salvation of Israel. Paul makes this very clear here.

Today, we look at what history has taught us when the Jews broke God's covenant by rejecting their Messiah—they were dispersed, persecuted, condemned, humiliated, marginalized, and even murdered (e.g. Holocaust). So, we are to be forewarned by these lessons, and know what it means to obey and fear God. Otherwise, He may likewise not spare us as well (v. 21).

Verse 24 points to a prophetic fulfilment when the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree will be grafted back into it—dead branches back into a

living tree will be revived! This refers to a time when unbelieving Jews will turn to Christ and find new life in Him.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. What is the Meaning of “All Israel Will Be Saved?” (11:25-32)<sup>5</sup>

Verses 25-27 speak of a partial hardening of Israel till the “fullness of the Gentiles” has been attained (end of church age). Then God will turn again to the Jews and then “All Israel will be saved”. “All Israel” will accept Jesus. This implies that before the fulfilment of the prophetic event of Christ’s Return, there will be a great re-gathering of Israel as God’s people.

Five reasons why Rom 11:26 refers to the nation of Israel as a whole being converted to Christ (but not necessarily every individual Jew):

- i. It is unlikely that the meaning of Israel changes between v. 25 and v. 26. The hardened Israel (the nation as a whole) will be the saved Israel (the nation as a whole).
- ii. The reference in v. 26 to banishing ungodliness from Jacob fits well with the national view of “all Israel”.

This pictures Christ’s return at the second coming, and banishing ungodliness from Jacob refers most naturally to the removal of the hardening referred to in verse 25.<sup>6</sup>

The hardening lasts until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and then Christ comes and lifts the veil and removes the hardening—He banishes ungodliness from Jacob, from “all Israel”.

- iii. The parallel between the two halves of v. 28 points to all Israel as a nation.

Verse 28a: “As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake.” This half of the verse surely refers to the nation as a whole—they are enemies of God.

So v. 28b surely refers to the nation as a whole as well: “But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.”

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<sup>4</sup> Using the “I am the vine and you are the branches” analogy in John 15:5, the cultivated olive tree can be interpreted as Christ and the grafted-in/grafted-back branches as His people.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/all-israel-will-be-saved>

<sup>6</sup> Jacob’s name was later changed to Israel after he wrestled with God in Gen 32:22ff (“Israel” means “he who prevails with God”). The 12 tribes of Israel were descendants of his 12 sons.

The point of v. 28 is to show that even though Israel now is a covenant-breaking, unbelieving nation, it is going to change. The nation will be converted later because of election and love. In other words, the “election” here applies specifically to Israel as the “chosen” people of God.

- iv. The parallels in verse 12 point in the same direction—i.e. a national restoration of Israel as God’s people.
- v. The nation now rejected will be accepted in v. 15.

The “acceptance” of the Jewish nation most naturally refers to the salvation of “all Israel”—the salvation of the nation as a whole some day.

#### 4. Summary Thoughts

- In connection with the second coming of Christ, there will be a great turning of Israel to Christ. The Lord will one day graft back His own covenantal people who have been broken away from Him (the Jews). He will bring them back from spiritual death to spiritual life. The Lord will be coming back for His Bride (who are both Jews and Gentiles redeemed in Him). And the knowledge of this glorious day to come led Paul to break into doxological delight in vv. 33-36.
- Thus, we should pray that the full number of the Gentiles comes in AND that the hardening be lifted from Israel. We should work for it with missions to the nations and witness to Israel. It is significant to note that Israel was re-established as a nation in 1948. From the 1960s onward, significant numbers of Jews turned to Christ as their Promised Messiah (known as “Hebrew Christians” or “Completed Jews” or “Messianic Jews”).

#### More and more Jews finding Jesus in Israel

- The First Wave of Jews coming to Jesus hit in the 1970s in America. The Second Wave were Russian Jews in the 1990s. And now – in what some observers call a Third Wave – Jews in Israel are coming to faith in increasing numbers.
- “I have never seen the breakthrough like we’re seeing now,” said Tuvya Zaretsky, chairman of the board for the Israel branch of Jews for Jesus. “We’re seeing a steady stream of Israelis who are coming to Jesus from all walks of life, though usually among the young. There seems to be a greater openness to spiritual input. We’re thinking it’s a Third Wave of in-gathering.”
- In the 1990s, there were about 3,000 Messianic Jews in Israel; today there are as many as 20,000 (still less than 1% of the population), said Simon Stout, executive assistant of Jews for Jesus in Tel Aviv. Also, one source estimates 150 congregations of like-minded believers in Israel. Of Israel’s 84 cities and towns, 81 have at least one messianic Bible study.
- “It’s been a very unusual turning in Israel,” said Zaretsky, who’s been traveling to Israel since 1971. “The community of believers there has solidified. They’ve found their voice. There’s less antagonism. The situation is changing.”

**Source:**

<http://blog.godreports.com/2015/04/more-and-more-jews-finding-jesus-in-israel/>



After dealing with this divisive issue in Rom 9-11, Paul then went on to give his apostolic instructions from Rom 12 onward—“Jews and Gentiles, do not be conformed to the ways of this world (e.g. ethnic division), but be transformed by the renewing of the mind ...”

## VII. Closing Comments

In the doctrine of election, we see both the majesty and mystery of God. He is good in His sovereignty, infinite in His mercy, loving in His omnipotence—that’s the majesty of His election. However, we as mere finite creatures cannot comprehend the grandeur of His plan. Isaiah 55:8-9 says: “My ways are not your ways, and my thoughts are not your thoughts; but just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” There is no contradiction in God, but there is finite understanding in us.

The mystery of election is that God can choose unconditionally, yet our wills are not coerced. We are persuaded by the Holy Spirit to believe. Further, we have the sense of free will in the process, just as the biblical authors did as they wrote the Word of God—inspired by the Spirit yet freely wrote according to their own personality.

## VIII. Discussion Questions

The Church of Jesus Christ is God’s chosen (2 Thess 2:13-14) just as the nation of Israel is God’s elect (Rom 11:28-29).

Rom 9:18 reads - “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”

Hence, the basis of being God's chosen/elect is according to His sovereign will.

Questions: How then should being God's chosen/elect lead you to ...

- i. Worship God?
- ii. Live with fellow believers?
- iii. Share the Gospel with unbelievers?
- iv. Grow in Christ in the midst of struggles?
- v. View the nation of Israel today?