

SOME THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS
UPON THE DOCTRINES OF
ELECTION, SALVATION AND SEALING

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By way of introduction, this writer wishes to make it clearly understood that he does not claim to fully understand all of the mechanics involved in the actual processes of election, salvation and sealing. This essay is simply an organization of thoughts upon the subject matter, a feeble attempt to express this writer's opinion which has been formed via long meditation upon the concepts. The efforts of others have also been reviewed and considered, and foremost – the Word of God has shaped these opinions. It is hoped that some of these thoughts can contribute to further study and provoke others to peer into some of these deep issues of theology.

As time has passed this writer has grown in his understanding of these concepts to such a degree that he can now be labeled a *supralapsarian*. Definitely a hyper-Calvinist. As generally defined a supralapsarian maintains the following order of “events”;

God so acted and decreed thusly:

- (1) God chose some persons to be saved, others were not chosen
- (2) God created the universe and all humans (in Adam and Eve)
- (3) God permitted the fall
- (4) God decreed to provide for the reconciliation (salvation) of the chosen (elect)
- (5) God decrees to apply this salvation (via the sacrifice and atonement through Jesus Christ) to the elect.

The above is a slightly modified form of the *supralapsarian* view. Priority is given to the predetermined will and design of our sovereign God. Other positions alter the sequence, and use other types of terminology (for example Baker - 158ff). Having thus stated this position, the way is now prepared for a discussion of these three concepts – (1) election (2) salvation and (3) sealing.

(1) ELECTION

God's election is not subject to error. He neither needs to adjust it, nor amend it, nor add to or delete from it. It is applied to some human beings, and human beings only [as far as salvation is concerned]. God elected certain humans from eternity past:

1 ROMANS 8:29, 30 [NASB]

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become (or, to be) conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren (30) and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

All of the above verbs are aorist, indicative, suggesting a singular occurrence and an aspect incorporating past time. The words “to become” (or “to be”) are *not* in the Greek text. Many other passages can be employed to show that God, in time past, chose some souls to be “glorified” and “justified” each aspects of salvation. For example note, Acts 13:48, II Timothy 1:9, Ephesians 1:4, et cetera. Clearly, election is a process *entirely* orchestrated by God, completely independent of the desires of humans. God’s election is not conditioned, in any way by any human(s). Arminians (Methodists, charismatics, “holiness” peoples, and even most "evangelicals") are convinced that man’s will has a part to play in salvation. However, this is parallel to saying that man plays a part in God’s election, as election cannot be separated from the consequence of election/salvation. Man is elevated to the status of God. It is not God, but rather man who freely chooses salvation. This choosing by men is seen as affecting election. Since God’s will is not to be frustrated, an elected person will (and, or is) experience eschatological salvation. The above named religious groups insist that humans can “choose” or reject their salvation, hence assuming the role of God!

On the contrary, man did already exercise his free-will, man chose evil. Adam represented us all in the garden. As a result of Adam’s sin, all, ALL humans became eternally separate from God, objects of wrath and destined for eternal punishment. It is only the mercy of God, which in His greatness, He exercised and for reasons of His own did choose to save some, to bring back some (reconcile). Prior to the fall, God had already known who these souls were. Satan did not fool God.

As with Jacob and Esau, God knows who are His before they enter into this dark planet. Human behavior does not affect their election, as election is based entirely upon God’s gracious plan, and of course this means that a believer’s salvation is just as eternally secure.

ROMANS 9:15

I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

EPHESIANS 2:8,9

For by **grace** you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift [salvation *and* faith] of God; (9) not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Acts 15:11, and many other passages could be incorporated as proof texts. The contexts and audiences are also relevant to this discussion, and it is hoped that the reader is taking the time to observe the contexts. (i.e. noting who is speaking, and to whom, *et cetera*)

(2) SALVATION

In a normal situation, all elected persons will respond to God's call, the particular good-news of salvation of (in) their respective dispensations. Yet, some may never hear the call, and still be considered as saved! It is suggested that some very young children and babies who die as babes, may be elected, and hence on the irreversible path to salvation. Humans who are severely retarded may also be elect. Going one step further, can a person who is naively used and taught falsehoods (note, Jeremiah 50:6!) about God, and who (for various reasons) rejects most "Christians" [perhaps he/she cannot ever forgive a terrible hypocrite he/she earlier encountered] still be saved, or elect? Though perhaps unusual, this writer suggests that it is possible that such a person can still be a prior elected soul. Such a person usually does not experience the joy of fellowship with God, nor does such a person bear any eternal fruit, nor is to be rewarded. But via no fault of their own, having been misled, and with no one thinking them "saved", God may have indeed prior chosen them. It is conceivable that God is simply employing His own time table. If this scenario is possible, then again it could be stated that election/salvation is not based upon a person's acceptance of a message about God! (Isaiah 65:1). Nor is it based upon the how, at any particular period, this person's behavior is judged by observers.

Evangelism has an important function in this present age, however it appears that many sincere folks utilize the preaching of the gospel as a means by which the non-elect become elect! Actually, the promotion and spread of the gospel should be utilized as an agent by which the elect become aware of their choosing. The hearing of the message can induce a dormant faith to become viable and active. In the earliest days of Christianity, evangelism had a much different function; the message was *new* and required sowing, and preservation. Most of the cultured world, at that time, [early first century], had not ever heard of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. They had no written records to turn to (other than some Old Testament prophecies). This early, and important sowing amongst the nations, has largely been done, especially by one man – Paul the Apostle to the nations. This is a unique and special title and ministry given to Paul, no one else is ever called the "Apostle to the nations (or, gentiles)". Note, Romans 11:13, I Timothy 2:7, II Timothy 1:11, and Acts 22:21. It appears that Paul completely fulfilled his ministry, all the nations heard from Israel to Spain.

The "falling away" of 1Timothy 4:1 concerns believers. Believers who have slipped away from proper doctrine and now go before the teachings of demons. Can an observer of such persons declare that these souls are not elect? Just because they were/are deceived cannot alter their election. Again such theories are in accord with the basic distinctions betwixt grace and works. Must a person hear a message to be elect? Must a response to the "gospel" be made before a person is reckoned as saved or elect? Note; this writer emphasizes that usually the elect hear and respond to the "good news". This is the usual and normal process.

(3) SEALING

When an elected person hears and responds to the “good news” about the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, THEN from a human perspective salvation is apprehended. Then a relationship with God can be established. Then the indwelling Holy Spirit seals, and exerts power. This hearing and responding seems to be God’s way for the elect to learn of their prior election and choosing toward salvation.

Calvin succinctly puts it thusly (Calvin – I – 465):

... until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed, because we view Him coldly without us, and so at a distance from us.

The Holy Spirit activates our faith, via the agency of the “good news” – Romans 10:17 (“hearing” assists with generating faith, the “gospel” is the agency [incorporating the preposition δια]).

Seal and *sealing* represent different words in the Greek, “seal” is ἀρραβων a noun, a pledge, a special endowment within every elect person. “Seal” is a necessary part of election, whereas the “sealing” [εσφραγισθητε a verb] of the believer (his/her mind) is not an essential part of election/salvation. The elect have this seal before being created. One should also consult Ephesians 1:14, II Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5.

The Holy Spirit indwells each saint. Before exiting from a womb, each saint has the Holy Spirit in him/her. This writer suggests that the Spirit is then in a germinal form. From Romans 8:9b one may ask “When does one ‘belong to Him’”?

... But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he/she does not belong to Him.

In Genesis 1:26, the “image” imparted to man, seems to contain a spiritual aspect. Note Galatians 4:1-9 also. [In Galatians 4:9, consider the passive participle thusly – “had been known” by God – γνωσθεντες]. It is suggested that all elect persons are born with the Holy Spirit indwelling them in a germinal form. At the proper time, the indwelling Spirit moves an elected person to respond to the “gospel”, the indwelling Spirit then activates the believer’s faith so as to be able to believe. When this faith is expressed, the new believer is then *sealed*. Many also consider the presence of the Holy Spirit as a Seal, yet note that He also “seals” - Ephesians 1:13, which needs quoting: [the several aorists posit simultaneous actions],

In Him, you also when listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise.. (see the reference to Wallace’s grammar, in “References”)

The Greek term for “sealed” is εσφραγισθητε, an aorist passive verb, used as “securing, safeguarding, and confirming”. The Holy Spirit helps us be secure (sealed) with the new concept – the awareness of our salvation in Christ Jesus! Note the dative of the agent, (“by”, as in “by the Holy Spirit”) with the passive, as opposed to the instrument (“with”) in the above quote of Ephesians 1:13.

Though it was said that the “Spirit had not yet been given” (John 7:39) what is meant is that particular type of ministry for the Holy Spirit, in that age! In this age He ministers as the One indwelling each individual “temple” [ναος], He also seals, convicts and baptizes. In various dispensations we find differing functions of the Holy Spirit. The pouring out in Joel and Acts 2 was an early rain, in anticipation of an universal latter rain (which was postponed!). Same Holy Spirit just differing functions. Acts 19:2 (with “when”) concerns the visible sign-type of reception, which was proper in that place and time and situation. This is proved by the results of their newly expressed faith, they were “possessed” and did signs. Each chosen person there already had, in a latent form, the indwelling Holy Spirit, otherwise they each would not have been able to believe. In most of the Acts account, it is the “gift” of, or the manifestation of the Holy Spirit which is the focus, not His regeneration function (which is ably noted by Cornelius Stam).

In Old Testament times, ample accounts illustrate the coming and going of the Holy Spirit upon peoples. King David’s famous request in Psalm 51:11b:

...take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,

is often used to prove that, back then, God would remove *completely* the presence of the Holy Spirit from a person. This may not be the case. Instead consider simply the removal of some of the functions and manifested presence of the Holy Spirit, leaving behind that ever present “still small voice” in the bosom of the believer. If this suggestion is valid, then even in Old Testament times the Holy Spirit served as an eternal “mark” (seal) within the elected person. Furthermore, it is suggested that *this particular function and presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit was largely dormant*. The Holy Spirit served primarily in an ornamental mode, not functioning to baptize, nor to keep out other “spirits” which may co-inhabit certain elected peoples (Mark 5:1-20!). Note that in this present dispensation, the Holy Spirit permanently *indwells* each saint; only our Apostle - Paul uses this word! [ενοικεω] to “indwell” of the Holy Spirit, now within each of us, functioning as a temple. No other spirit[s] can thus inhabit.

Under the ministry of Paul the Holy Spirit caused His abode to become a “holy place” [ναος], and then no evil spirit could co-inhabit. This function (and many others) was not in operation in Old Testament times. However, do consider the distinct possibility that in some way the Holy Spirit did associate Himself, continually, with the elect – not in the same manner in which He was amongst the nation of Israel as a whole – Haggai 2:5. In the millennial reign, God promises to put His Holy Spirit within the bosom of every elected person, in such a way that each person is coerced – Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

In this present age, once the indwelling Spirit is activated, believers can then yield to Him (voluntarily, via exercise of free-will). They can then be liable to be filled (which is a consequence of voluntary yielding).

Unlike the scenes in Acts 2 (and elsewhere) the Holy Spirit does not now in this age manipulate people, no coercion is needed. Believers can choose to serve the Lord, to study the Word, to be obedient, to stand, to yield. [God does act to encourage growth and is a disciplining Father.]. When one does these free-will acts, one is filled with the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit are at work – love, joy, peace, patience et cetera (in varying degrees) Galatians 5:22, 23.

Thus, sealing, is an act of the Holy Spirit (of God), it occurs when a person responds to the urgings of the indwelling Holy Spirit to exercise the gift of faith. Unlike election, an individual does play a role in the process of being sealed by God. The elected agents simply express their God-given faith. Herein lies the distinction between a “Seal” and “sealing”. The “Seal” (earnest) is not affected at all by any humans, whereas “sealing” results only when faith is expressed. Being unsealed [the verb] does not affect election. Notice that possession of the “Seal” (the indwelling Holy Spirit) is a indicative and a mark of being elect. The seal is [a mark] is not visible, but the process of being sealed (the verb), is connected with an elected person’s response and activation of the gift of faith.

Before concluding this essay, it may serve well to address one of the many objections which are often raised against some of the suggestions and theories posed herein. It is worded often thusly:

...if in the beginning God chose some, and not others, then He is responsible for those created persons who were not chosen. Did He not create these non-elect so as to be pre-disposed to sin? Could He therefore, be held accountable for their sin?

Though syllogistically possible, this common mode of reasoning overlooks one vital fact. God gave all men free-will in the beginning, all being typified in Adam. Both those who were elect (in Adam) and those who were not elect (in Adam) expressed their choice, they chose evil. **They** chose evil, without any encouragement or suppression from God. Totally acting on his own volition Adam fell. In response God activated His preplanned election process.

It is suggested that all men were in one sense not created equal, that is, from God’s perspective. From man’s view all were created equal (note, Proverbs 16:2). Back then, the Holy Spirit often exerted no compelling influence, He was simply a signature. One may conjecture that in God’s mind, He had endowed all humans with this mark, or Seal, so that all could utilize “Him” if future circumstances called for it. In prior dispensations, the Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell any saints.

A quote from William K. Harrison’s essay (Harrison – 1973), may assist with apprehension of some of these very nebulous concepts:

The consequences of sin are so terrible that in permitting it the righteous and just God must see it as essential to the achievement of a purpose whose benefits are of supreme importance to Himself.

In closing, one may note that a mystery still remains: how is it that man freely expressed his/her will in the garden (as free will) and yet this choice accords with God's predetermined plan? Man, perhaps, cannot fathom such Divine operations and must be content at this time, to only view the results.

CONCLUSION

This author contends that his supralapsarian view of God's will towards humans is largely stable and viable. He offers suggestions which intimate that election and salvation cannot be separated. Hence if a person is prior elected, he/she will be saved and will experience the ultimate salvation. Man cannot defeat the prior determined will of God. God is sovereign. Some humans may be naive of the gospel message, or via deception misunderstand it, in which case election is not altered. The author further suggests that the normal process of salvation includes the human responding to the good news about Jesus Christ. This response is generated by the gift of faith (via grace) activated by the written Word, as stated in Romans 10:17,

"...faith is *activated* by the hearing of the Word..." as opposed to the conjecture "comes".

This writer suggests that all of the elect, as prior chosen children of God, have the Holy Spirit indwelling them in a germinal form **prior** to their physical birth. This indwelling Holy Spirit lies dormant until activated. When activated, by God, He (the Holy Spirit) enables the person to believe, and then seals (confirms, secures) that new awareness. The indwelling Holy Spirit may then fill that believer if the believer chooses to obey the rightly-divided Word. The entire salvation process is predetermined by God, before the creation of the universe. It is nowise conditioned upon the will of any person. It is entirely God's doing. Man's free-will does not act upon God's election/salvation, either for *or* against it! God originally gave man a choice, man chose evil. Hence God is not the one who made the actual choice in the garden of Eden. A consequence of man's choice was the introduction of God's *preplanned* election process.

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