

A FEW NOTES CONCERNING
ELECTION/SALVATION

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In my personal Biblical studies, and indeed in my personal library, observers will note that a certain aspect of theological perspectives is not well represented. This aspect is in the realm of *systematic theology*; that is texts which explain and describe various theological systems developed by various theologians over time. One will find—Chafer's systematic theology, Baker's dispensational theology, Calvin's Institutes, reformed views by Boettner, several works by various Arminian-minded scholars, and a sprinkling of various concepts from the ancient church fathers onward. Supplementing this mixture is a trifling selection on religious history in which numerous religious distinctions and creeds are noted.

Due, perhaps to the above limitations, is a lack of clear information on the subject of various positions within the Calvinistic understanding; in particular the *supralapsarian* view. It is supposed that a clear treatise upon this subject exists, but this author does not possess it, nor have I seen such a work. Consequently, a brief account of my supralapsarian position and a justification for it follows.

The prime tenet of a supralapsarian position is the concept that God did first elect (choose) various peoples as His, before any type of creation. In other words God's first decree was election, then followed creation, then the fall, a provision for salvation was made, and lastly the provision for salvation was applied. The order appears thusly:

The decree to elect some for salvation, others not elect.

The decree to create humans in Adam (constituting both elect and non-elect).

The decree to allow the fall.

The decree to provide for salvation of the elect.

The decree to apply this salvation to the elect.

I was not born with a supralapsarian understanding, it has been slowly developed over the years as I have studied the Bible, it is the most satisfactory position which coincides with Bible truth as I perceive it. As the years pass my view may grow or change slightly, which understanding tempers my dogmatism.

It is easy to find objections to the supralapsarian position, indeed most "fundamentalist" groups in America adhere to an *infralapsarian* or *sublapsarian* position: both of these

views move the first decree to follow the creation and fall decrees. One of the common objections to the supralapsarian position is that it is inconceivable that God could reckon a person as elect when such a person does not yet exist or is not yet created. This objection makes good sense on the surface. Thus, they place the creation decree before the election decree. Against this objection lies a salient fact, this objection is injecting human understanding into the mind of God! Supporters of the objection insist that a person must first exist as a creation before God can choose. In support of their argument they use such passages of Scripture as Romans 9:18, (ASV)

So then he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Focus is upon the pronouns "whom" by which they declare that a "whom" must first be created in order for God to display mercy or election. Herein lies their basic flaw, they are supposing that God can only perceive beings as do humans. They are saying that God must view "beings" as from the limited human perspective. Instead of forcing God to adjust to our level of cognition why not allow Him to transcend our limited comprehension?

It is suggested that God comprehends a human or a "being" simply from the concept of a name or thought. The "being" need not yet exist as a fleshly creature. This definition of "being" (existing only as a name or thought) is difficult to grasp from a human understanding due to the formation of philosophical canons of thinking. By formal definition a "being" must exist in terms which a human can grasp, this is probably not the case with God, as God should be able to fully comprehend "beings" without three dimensional forms! This concept requires faith, and since it is of faith, it is open to the attacks and challenges of the rationalists. Note the primacy of "will" in the following quote, it precedes creation! (Revelation 4:11, NASB):

Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.

Another type of objection used to oppose a true supralapsarian view concerns an example of the word for "chose" or "elect". John 6:70, in which Jesus chooses the 12, is often utilized to demonstrate that just because Jesus "chooses" someone, that choice does not in-

dicate salvation (or "eternal security"). In using John 6:70, a fatal error is generated when they apply this meaning (*id est* that "choose" must always equal "salvation"), note John 6:70 (ASV):

Jesus answered them, Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?

In this passage it needs to be pointed out that "choose" (ἐξελεξάμην) does not indicate salvation, rather it only shows a choosing of 12 *as messengers* as Judas was probably never reckoned as saved. Seeing Judas here, Arminians declare that Jesus' election (choosing) therefore must not equal salvation (or that He is not able to keep His chosen!). Obviously here, this verb "choose" does not equate with that election which indicates salvation as seen in John 15:16. These interpreters are guilty of ignoring the semantic connotations of words which the context supplies. In John 6:70 they force upon the word the notion of that particular type of election which has an ultimate salvation in view (as does John 15:19). If they are correct in declaring that all usages of this Greek verb must indicate an eschatological salvation then what must they think of the same verb in such passages as Luke 14:7?

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, (KJV)

Here the "invited guests" (the "bidden") are choosing certain places in which to dine, if we follow the argument as poised above, then these places are chosen for salvation, which is absurd! Hence the fallacy of their argument is obvious. Not all usages of the word for election or choosing equate with salvation, the individual contexts supply the connotative meaning to the verb or noun. In numerous Biblical passages, in both the LXX and in the New Testament, "choose" can have a variety of meanings; one of which is that form of election which consummates in salvation.

An example of such confused semantics is easy to find in the writings of the Arminian, J. Rodman Williams [refer to volume 2 of his work entitled, *Renewal Theology*, Zondervan, 1990, page 128, note 39], herein he abuses John 6:70 as prior illustrated.

Not only did the elect prior exist before their physical birth, but they prior existed in a very unique Person, in such a manner which is not fully apprehended.

Many fine Bible scholars will note that in II Corinthians 5:17 a new creation is manifest. At times the word "creation" is better rendered here as "creature" (II Cor. 5:17, NASB). Colossians 1:15 can add some needed perspective here: (ASV)

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation:

The "firstborn of all creation" means in its Colossian's context, that Jesus Christ is first in every sense, and that of those who are and who will be resurrected from the dead, the good Lord was the first of that unique group, note Colossians 1:18. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Body of believers (or, the elect), in Him all believers exist. Believers believe because God gave them the ability to believe. Those who were not able to express their God-given faith (due to a premature death, or due to other reasons) are still elect, and hence still saved as salvation is not conditioned by any human response or statement. What the elect are led to believe does not in any way alter God's prior choice of them! However make a special note of this statement, normally the elect respond to the good news concerning Jesus Christ, thus manifesting their faith. This is the normal scenario. Additionally the *Westminster Confession*, x.3, also declares a similar observation, that election is not based upon a recipient's response.

At this point, one needs to note that theology stems from the literal Biblical text, the Word from God. It takes years to develop a good Bible-based theology, especially one which is free from religious distortions. A theology must or should be developed by direct reading and study of the Scriptures, independent of commentaries (though they are useful). It is clear that a good theology follows the Word, a theology is not first, it is the fruit of good Biblical study.

When a married person lusts after another person (other than his/her husband or wife), he/she is guilty of adultery (Matthew 5:28). Thinking equals the act. Thinking is a work, an act which you will. In light of Matthew 5:28 and some common sense, God certainly sees the mental thought patterns as willful acts instituted by the person's own brain. Humans are saved by grace, not works. Faith *follows* election, it does not precede election. We have that special God-given FAITH because we are first elect. The fruit is not first,

rather the tree is. Faith is a fruit, Galatians 5:22. Galatians 5 is not speaking of just any old faith, or peace or joy *et al*, it is that special faith which comes only from God. All elect beings were elected, prior to creation, each was given a measure of faith, (often in seed form) which they may or may not express. Thus, election or salvation is not based upon faith, as election is prior to our expression (work) of faith. The actual necessary element essential to one being reckoned as "saved" is the **possession** of faith, not its expression, there is a significant difference.

*From the word, flows a theology
From election flows faith,*

It is wise not to put the cart before the horse as they say! As indicated in Romans 10:17, hearing the gospel message stimulates the already present faith, the seed sprouts! (Note that the word "comes" in verse 17, is added, as one could easily supply instead "is activated by", or "is stimulated by"). Comes, adds a sense of source, which the several, prepositions juxtaposed, do not imply. The source in this verse is $\delta\iota\alpha$, "by the word of or about Christ", the preposition with hearing ($\epsilon\chi$), shows it is here a means or agent. "Hearing" is not the source when juxtaposed with $\delta\iota\alpha$, but rather the means. The information about Jesus Christ, is the power empowering the believing/hearing, it is the contents of the message, not the so-called "preaching" of the KJV at I Corinthians 1:21! Our God-given faith comes from the fact that we are first elect. It is that faith which belongs to and comes from the Person of Jesus Christ, which is given to us, He is the Author. (Hebrews 12:2, Galatians 2:16). Romans 10:17 is not stating the source of the believer's faith, rather it is declaring how a message can activate a faith.

Until Jesus Christ was resurrected the elect existed without a Head *per se*! they existed in a unique state having no true body! This is true of Adam as well as all of those elected souls who followed. God has placed all elected souls into this body of Christ, some in an earthly portion some in a heavenly portion; both portions will experience their final unity in the distant future, Ephesians 1:10. Nevertheless, in God's mind they already existed in Christ before the creation of the universe! This sublime thought is reinforced by the text of Ephesians 1:3,4: (KJV)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in (H)him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before (H)him in love:

In this KJV quote "foundation" is the Greek καταβολης, a term which denotes "conception" or "beginning". Each elected "person" existed in Christ before creation. In exactly what manner or form we are not told, but the fact of the matter is that the elect did somehow "exist" in the mind of God, as in the Body of Christ, before creation. We pre-existed in Christ! A Bible student might now declare that Romans 16:7 (which states that several persons were in Christ before Paul) indicates that various peoples are placed "in Christ" at differing times. This apparent conundrum is explained in part by Galatians 1:22, and by the observation that these persons were probably aware of their salvation before Paul learned of his election/salvation (on the road to Damascus, Acts chapter 9).

It is also true, that at one time we, the elect of this dispensation, were formerly seen as dead. This is noted in such passages as Ephesians 2:1-8, (KJV)

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

One may declare, therefore, that if we were dead, then we could not have prior existed as saved or as an elected being(s), as "existence" can mean alive, and thus God would not have created dead beings. This reasoning misses the fact that our death (that is, the death of the elect) is a judicial death, it is a sentence. Jesus Christ died in the elect's stead, as John 3:16 indicates (with "world" equaling the "elect" in this verse). The context of the above Ephesian passage dictates that during the ages before the "church age" God dealt exclusively with the nation of Israel, from whom the elect were drawn. Proselytes were the only non-Jewish elect manifested during the dispensation of the Law. (Though an argument can be generated which can suggest that some of these elected non-Jews were not, or

perhaps were not known as true proselytes to Judaism, for example the Ninevites of Jonah's day, perhaps Job, Ruth and the Samaritan woman at the well).

Dispensationally the non-Jews of the world as a group were without hope since the institution of the chosen nation of Israel, and were not a pool of peoples from whom the elect could be drawn out of, generally speaking few—were elect. None of the elect were *ever* viewed as spiritually dead (with "dead" meaning totally without God). Certainly before Moses and the giving of the Law, hope was based upon promises and upon the law written upon the heart (Romans 2:14, 15, 4:21; and note especially all of Romans chapter 4).

Ultimate death is eternal separation from God, and this occurs when the non-elect are placed into the Lake of Fire (Gehenna). Jesus Christ experienced a separation from God; upon the cross God turned from the crucified Lord, and darkness covered the land. (Galatians 3:13, II Corinthians 5:21). We believers too, were crucified with Christ, and our sins and corrupt natures were separated from God. However, our corrupt natures still live in our fleshly bodies and minds, not until our rapture will we be entirely free. Yet in God's mind we now exist without these hindrances! We exist in Christ! We have died to sin. Christ was made sin for us, II Corinthians 5:21, and note, He is without sin! I John 3:5. Herein lies the principle, that Christ Jesus did not die that eternal death, He was not cast into Gehenna, as Gehenna did not then exist, nor yet does. We who are elect shall die a physical death, we must (except for many of those elect who are alive when the rapture happens, minus the 144,000). Jesus Christ died a physical death, His separation was for three days, and we know that He was still God's Son, still sinless in Paradise/Hades! His Spirit was always in God's hands—Luke 23:43, 46. Prior to Paul's gospel, the Gentile nations were seen *as* dead, non-Jewish nations were dead, yet some few individuals were elect. The "perish" of John 3:16, is eternal death, that terrifying spiritual death, reserved for the God-hating non-elect. Rahab was not an Israelite, yet she lives today, she was seen as dead, but actually she lives. Ephesians chapter two is illuminating the fact that all nations other than Israel existed outside the Law, they were seen as dead.

Our current battles against the flesh (in which we now dwell) may bear fruit and growth for us, but we are viewed as complete and perfect in the mind of God, He sees not our fleshly natures, He sees us in Christ! As a bonus in conjunction with this glorious position, God has given to each of the elect here in our temporary earthly states, the indwelling Holy Spirit Who assists us with our daily struggles against the present world, against the evil ones and our corrupt spiritual natures.

I am inclined to think that the "new creature" of II Corinthians 5:17 must mean that from the time in eternity past in which the Holy Spirit placed each elected person into the Body of Christ, (I Corinthians 12:13) a new creature existed, **but** was not made known to the universe until Paul's revelations. Prior to this manifestation to angels and the departed souls (and all other heavenly observers!) this new creature existed in the mind of God, to Him it was not "new". This fusion of Jew and non-Jew into one without distinction was new only in that it was never the normal procedure under the prior dispensation of Law. Even a proselyte of old, was a unique blend of Jew and non-Jew, howbeit under the legal covenant of the Law. This current manifestation (thus "new") is part of the fabric which makes up a portion of the Pauline revelations, a part of the "mystery", the new beings are actually, fully organically new. It was not fully revealed in times past, but since Paul's revelations were made known, this new creature was introduced to the created universe to observe as it grows. Paul's revelations also contain other details which are indeed revelations, NEW information! such as the fact that in this age believers are now walking "temples" of the Holy Spirit! Below is Ephesians 3:8-11,

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was (εδουθη aorist tense) this grace given, to preach unto the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to enlighten all men as to what is the dispensation of the mystery is, which for ages had been hid **by** God Who created all things; to the intent that **now** unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies, might be made known, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God in accordance to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (note the "eternal purpose" a purpose embedded within the text of God's Word)

Indeed, even the final conception of the entire Body will not be fully visible nor comprehended until the end of the ages, Ephesians 1:10. Yet the fact remains that God indicates to us, that He had this already conceived in His mind. Recall that in Exodus 26, God gives the blueprints of the tabernacle, even *before* it was built. Christ pre-existed before the creation, we pre-existed in Christ before the creation, John 1:1, and Ephesians 1:4, 2:10.

A supralapsarian view of God's decrees rests largely upon faith and upon a certain method of Biblical interpretation, hopefully a clear literal one. My understanding of the literal word, is not new, my interpretation is logical and literal, it contains various *a priori* ingredients and is thus subject to scrutiny (and should be) by those who were trained in Arminian or quasi-Calvinistic interpretations. Human reasoning is useful and needed in

Biblical studies and exposition, but human reasoning cannot fully explain nor comprehend God's reasoning's. Believers must, at this time be satisfied that God knows what He is doing, even if we cannot always understand His will! He is the Potter!

When God states that we were prior chosen in Christ before we were created, (Ephesians 1:4) and that we were created in Christ, such information is not classed as human imaginations, it should be perceived as a reality. This information was made known primarily after the fact (that is, it was not made abundantly clear in the OT¹). This wonderful reality was first made known by the Apostle Paul, and in it we can discern some of the central characteristics of Divine Election, an election totally independent of human will or human desires. Independent because it existed as a reality before humans were formed from the dust. God's will, His election powers, have always been distantly perceived, they are not a mystery (though their inner workings are), the mystery in the Pauline revelations is the fact that God had planned for the Jew and Gentile fusion into one Body, without the former legal distinctions. Before the Law was given even Abraham had a seminal understanding of God's election, of His sovereignty, and of resurrection. The Seed of Abraham, had prior blessings! (Genesis 12:7, Galatians 3:16).

Finally, in closing, may I present what I believe to be the best Greek text of Galatians 3:26, do compare it with other translations!

"For you are all sons of God, through (the) faith of Christ Jesus" - Galatians 3:26, as per Greek manuscripts P⁴⁶, 6, 206, 917, 1739, 1836, 1874. (In these witnesses, no "in" is seen before "Christ Jesus"). It is the faithfulness of Christ Jesus which saves us, not our faith in Him - Romans 3:22, KJV. And yes, our faith *in* Him, is also important and is seen in numerous other passages.

From the above observations a supralapsarian view acquires some of its necessary elements for validation; may these observations help you understand, in part, why I have such a faith.

¹ There are numerous OT passages which do direct the student to ultimately recognize that the chosen are secure in God, such as Psalms 37:28, 145:20, and Genesis 17:7,8 coupled with Galatians 3:16!