

THE SUPERIORITY OF CALVINISM

Preached March 8, 1959, by Pastor Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church,
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In the past few years, there has been a very noticeable revival of the Calvinistic doctrine of Unconditional Election, indicated among other things, by the publication of many books written in defense of it. This truth, which had slumbered for nearly a generation, is now beginning to shake itself like a mighty giant. The proof of this doctrine is so forceful, and its position in the scriptures is so incontestable, that few are bold enough to challenge it. Those who do oppose the Doctrines of Grace usually resort to subtlety and dishonesty by clouding the issues and misrepresenting the truth. But, when the clear-cut issues are openly faced, Calvinism always walks off without a scratch.

One very ostentatious truth of the superiority of Calvinism is the history of theological writings; the works written in favor of Arminianism are generally buried and forgotten, but the writings of the great Calvinistic thinkers continue to walk out of the path and wage war on error. In fact, there is generally a stamp of disgrace associated with Arminianism. The name of Pelagius is linked with shame and contempt, but Augustine, his second century opponent, is still loved, studied, and universally respected by the theological world. Some might venture to read the works of James Arminius and consider his views, but few are willing to receive the brand which is associated with his name. Those who adhere to his doctrines would much rather be called moderate-Calvinists. There is something reproachful, I say, about being called an Arminian. On the other hand, John Calvin's work still lives. The theology he taught has had strong advocates in every generation, and they are not ashamed of the gospel he preached. Though the bones of this man have been dug up and burnt over and over again by those who despise his doctrines, and though all sorts of railings and false accusations have been hurled against him, still his influence is keenly felt. As long as the LORD Jesus has followers on this earth, the writings of John Calvin, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and so forth will continue to be respected and their names revered.

However, it seems at the present, in many places at least, the issue is shifting somewhat. In some quarters, the danger is not so much an open repudiation of the Doctrine of Election, as a tendency to minimize its importance. There are many who

profess to believe this truth, who nevertheless relegate to the realm of the nonessential and the antedated. Frequently we hear it said: “Sure, election is true, but why get excited about it? We believe God is sovereign, we just do not emphasize it.” Of course, how they mean emphasis is to declare it from the pulpit.

My friends, in my opinion, those who talk thus are the real enemies of these doctrines. The most dangerous opponents of the truth are not its avowed enemies, but its professed friends, who either minimize it, excuse for it, or tone it down so that it has no edge. It is true that Christ was crucified by an angry mob, but it was the kiss of one of His disciples that was the instrumental cause of His death. Those who harbor in the ranks of the soldiers of the cross, but really have no desire to fight, are to be feared more than those who openly wage war against them. So, we find ourselves facing a new difficulty with these so-called brethren. They know that Calvinism is right, but if we preach what we believe, and try to take an all-out stand for the truth, we are branded ‘extremists’ and ‘radicals.’ Now it seems that the issue is not so much whether the Doctrine of Election is true, but whether it is important.

In answering this question, we may observe that the doctrine of election is taught either by direct statement or strong implications, in practically every book in the New Testament, not to mention the Old. It is important enough that it greets us on the very threshold of the books of *John, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 and 2 Peter, and 2 John*. It is important enough that one whole chapter is devoted to the development of it, and that is *Romans chapter 9*. This cannot be said of many bible truths.

It is important enough that our LORD, who is the pattern of all true ministers, expounded this subject on at least three different occasions: *Luke 4, John 6, and John 10*. The first time, they were so filled with wrath that they endeavored to lead Him to the edge of the hill of the city where they lived, that they might cast Him down headlong. On the second occasion, some of His hearers said “*This is an hard saying; who can hear it?*” and then many walked no more with Him. (*John 6:60*) On the third occasion, that is in *John 10*, after He had discoursed, the Jews took up stones to stone Him. So, as we can see, Christ did not shy to declare this truth, though He did not always suit the fancies of His auditors in so doing. Oh, that modern professed ministers of the gospel would try to better emulate the example of their

LORD. In spite of these facts, still we are told to tone down on this subject, and not insist on it so frequently.

Election is true, it is said, but it must be kept back from the people, and should be cautiously guarded. I say, away with such speech craft; this idea was born in Rome, and there let it die. The only consideration is: if this doctrine is in the bible, then it is true, and if it is true, it should be shouted from the housetops. The reason our generation has sunk into such an ignorant and spineless state is because professed teachers of the gospel have ceased to faithfully preach the word of God, and have given to their disciples only that which appeals to their carnal minds. The business of preaching the gospel and representing God before men is a serious affair. Not only is the Christian minister personally accountable unto the Lord for what he teaches, but to some extent, he is responsible for those who come unto his influence. It therefore behooves every man who professes to have a divine call, not only to diligently seek out the way of God, but once he has found it, to walk therein.

In the light of this, I humbly make the following charges against those who know the truth but do not contend for it: First, I charge them with compromise. It is no insignificant matter to know something to be right and yet refuse to stand for it. Second, I charge them with dishonesty and deceit. The ministry of a man who does not know the truth may be charged with unsoundness, but the ministry of one who knows the truth, but will not proclaim it, is a cheat and a fraud. The sin of the one is a sin of ignorance, the sin of the other is willful and malicious deception, which will end in his own destruction, and that of his hearers. Third, I charge them with the betrayal of a sacred trust. The preacher of the gospel has been entrusted with the oracles of God, and it is his duty to preach them. If he does not do so, but hides his talents under a bushel, he has proven himself to be a wicked and a slothful servant. It is a terrible sin to withhold that which is profitable to eternity bound mortals. Fourth, I charge him with the fear of man. All excuses for not preaching what we believe can usually be traced to a selfish motive. Specifically, that of soliciting the respect and approbation of men, rather than the praise of God. So many preachers, like Esau, sell their birthright for a mess of pottage, willing to sacrifice a clear conscience and the favor of God in order to gain temporal advantage.

After all, friends, what is involved in the controversy between the advocates of Unconditional Election and their opponents? In this dispute, are we just resurrecting

and rehashing questions from the remote past which no longer have any significance; mere metaphysical subtleties devoid of any practical bearing? Indeed, this is not the case. This is the eternal conflict between right and wrong; truth and error. This controversy involves the question of whether all the glory for salvation is to be given to God, or whether part of it is due unto man. These two poles of thought are different as night and day. They are incompatible. Some have argued that these two systems can lay down their arms of contention and work in harmony, but time has proven this to be false. The scriptures say: ***“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”*** (*Amos 3:3*)

The importance of the Doctrine of Election can be seen by the savory and helpful influence it has had on the religious world, and on society in general. It is a known fact that this truth has had a prominent play in all of the great evangelical awakenings of the past. The protestant reformation was promoted by firm believers in this doctrine. The English puritans, some of the Godliest individuals to bear the name of Christians, were Calvinists. And the Great Awakening of the 1700's, under Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield, was characterized by a frequent and positive proclamation of this truth. Mr. Charles Spurgeon, whom many esteem to be the greatest Christian minister since the apostles, contended for Unconditional Election until his dying day. It seems, however, that many who laud and praise these great men are much more impressed with their success, than with their boldness and courage, and their proclamation of the truth. The indifferent attitude towards the Doctrine of Election has many evil results, not the least of which are the inconsistencies and unholy amalgamations it frequently causes. We constantly see and hear of men who proclaim to believe the truth, but nevertheless are involved in highly Arminian and even irreligious alliances. Because they have not openly avowed their belief, they are embraced by the opponent of the truth, and are found to support and further causes and systems which they well know to be unfriendly to the Gospel of Grace. Furthermore, those who do not positively advocate the truth, in reality, give countenance to error, and even permit lies to breathe under their very noses.

Since all men by nature are merit-mongers, Arminianism, like weeds in a garden, will spring up and flourish unattended, but the truth must be planted and cultivated. By failing to reprove false beliefs, and concealing what they term “the high, mysterious doctrine” of Calvinism, they tacitly cast their votes for heterodoxy, and

though they harbor the truth in their own bosom, the congregation to which they minister continues in ignorance and error. But, when the sovereignty of God in election is firmly and clearly proclaimed, the idols of human merit, free will, and salvation by works are dashed to pieces. So then, I of course heartily recommend that the Doctrine of Election be preached, and that openly. It is the best of antidotes for a self-righteous generation which is spiritually sick, because it is then fed on hush and rainwater, while the meat of the word has been left to mold.

This doctrine inspires faith, instills humility, animates zeal, promotes piety, kills pride, encourages bible studies, and most of all: it glorifies the name of our God. We most certainly cannot be silent on this foundation truth, upon which the entire school of redemption is build. If I am asked how long election shall be preached, I answer: “as long as there is a bible to be believed, and sinners to be saved.” The bible, which is God’s infallible revelation, shall always contain this precious truth, and no matter of human ingenuity can wrest it therefrom. And as long as there are mortal men destined for eternity, we personally shall continue to cry ***“it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”*** (Romans 9:16) I have written another poem; it is with throng of God’s elect. May I quote it for you this morning:

*“Oh thou high exalted Savior,
Can it be that thou art mine?
Has thy love, so fixed and changeless,
Pitched on me to call me thine?
Has thy father’s sovereign mercy
From eternal ages past,
Placed me in that pail of favor
Out beyond the judgement blast?
Oh, such consolation bringing,
What can fetch my soul away?
This, the LORD has promised to me,*

Then what power can say me nay?"

This is Fred Phelps, Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the LORD willing, at this same time, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the LORD Jesus Christ, and grace be with all them that love our LORD Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen.