

Election, Obedience, and the Law of Liberty

Ministry on 1 Peter 1:2 · March 3, 2007

Elect According to the Foreknowledge of God the Father

First Peter 1:2 opens with one of the most electrifying words in the New Testament: elect. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And this foreknowledge is not to be confused with omniscience — the bare knowledge that God has of everything — nor with prescience — the knowledge of what will happen ahead of time. Foreknowledge as Peter uses it here is determinative. He foreknew us in Christ. He placed us there. It is not that God looked ahead and saw who would believe and then chose them on that basis; His foreknowledge is the cause, not the consequence.

This is the Father. The truth of the Father is precious. We learn to pray to the Lord Jesus when we are young, and that is perfectly right — we may pray to the Lord Jesus at any age and it is right. But the holy privilege that has been opened to us is to come before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with everything. He is already preparing the Father's house. The Lord Jesus entered there as victorious man, and it waits for us — every member, not one left behind, all of grace, all of us brought to the Father's house in nearness to Himself.

Election is by three persons acting each in their own distinct capacity. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father — through sanctification of the Spirit — unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Father, Spirit, Son. All three divine persons are always engaged in every work, and the distinction of their persons is maintained in every action.

Sanctification of the Spirit — Set Apart Unto Two Things

The Spirit's work is to set apart — that is the force of sanctification in Scripture. And He sets us apart to two things: to obedience, and to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Both of these point to Christ. The sprinkling of the blood makes us His own. And the obedience to which we are set apart is not obedience in the abstract — it is the obedience of Christ.

We are set apart to the obedience of Christ. That is the measure and character of Christian obedience. It does not mean we can do everything Christ did — we cannot, and we certainly cannot act in atonement as He did at Calvary. But it says something about what marked that obedience and what God looks for in ours as its pattern. What characterized the obedience of the Lord Jesus as man was two things: perfect dependence and perfect obedience. These were precisely the two things in which the first man failed. Adam fell from dependence and fell from obedience. And everywhere man fails, Christ takes it up and makes it good for God's glory.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. — John 14:15

He never pleased Himself — not once, from the cradle to the grave. He said, I do always those things that please the Father. Peter says He did no sin; that is the outward acts. Paul says He knew no sin — that is the inward condition, the root, not just the fruit. The standard is high. Men say it is impractical and must be lowered. But where would anyone have the right to modify the standard God has set? The right response is to confess that we fall short of it — and to know that when He comes and takes us to be with Himself, the old nature gone, we shall be like Him. Every thought and every act in the glory will be for the pleasure of God.

Keeping His Commandments and Keeping His Word

John 14:15 says: if ye love me, keep my commandments. His commandments are the definite expressions of His holy authority and will. They are found in the Gospels and equally in the epistles — the apostle Paul makes clear that what he writes are the commandments of the Lord. They are the explicit statements of what He requires.

But verse 23 of the same chapter is different in character: if a man love me, he will keep my word — singular. And then: my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. There is a distinction between keeping His commandments and keeping His word. His word includes the breathings of His heart that are not expressed as explicit commands — things that a soul attuned to Him will hear and respond to because of love, not because of obligation.

The three mighty men of David who broke through the Philistine lines to bring him water from the well of Bethlehem had no command. David had only said: oh, that I had a drink from the well of Bethlehem. That was not a command. But the love and attachment those men had to David changed it into one for them. They heard the longing of his heart. David poured out the water before the Lord, saying it was the blood of those men who had risked their lives. What those men did was the fruit of keeping David's word, not his commandment. And so our keeping of the Lord's word — attending to the breathings of His heart in Scripture, being responsive to what He values and desires — opens the way for the Father and the Son to come and make their abode with us.

The Law of Liberty — the Train on the Track

James 2:12 speaks of the law of liberty. A law is a fixed principle of operation. The law of gravity means that things subject to gravity act uniformly and without exception. The law of liberty means there is a fixed principle of operation when a soul is walking in liberty before God.

Think of a train engine on its tracks. The engineer designed the engine and the tracks together. The engine rolls forward on the tracks with ease — that is its designed mode of operation, what we might call the liberty of engines. If the engine decides to jump the track and strike out across a field, it immediately bogs down. There is no more progress. It has left the law of liberty. And the law of liberty for the soul is the same: the new nature expressing itself in the will of God moves forward. As soon as we begin to please ourselves, we are like the engine off the track, bogged down in mud, making no progress.

Second Corinthians 3:17 gives the power for this: where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Christian liberty is not freedom to do as one pleases — it is freedom from self to do the will of God. A brother who had thought deeply about this said: power in an evil day is manifested in separation from evil unto the Lord. Not being swamped by the evil age, not being absorbed into it — but being separated from it unto the Lord. And there is sufficient power in each of us for this, because the Spirit who was sent on the day of Pentecost has not changed. The power is there. What may be lacking is the desire, but not the power.

Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. — 2 Corinthians 3:17

Perfect Dependence and Perfect Obedience — the Pattern

Psalm 32:8 says: I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go — I will guide thee with mine eye upon thee. That assumes we are looking at Him. If we turn our faces away and pretend not to see, the guidance is missed. But if our eye is on Him and His eye is on us, the guidance comes through — not necessarily through explicit commandments, but through that attentiveness to what is in His heart.

The perfection of man in the eyes of God is the display of perfect dependence and perfect obedience. That was what the meal offering in Leviticus typified —

fine flour, no lumps, no unevenness, perfectly mixed with oil, with oil poured upon it, baked in the fire — and there was never any unevenness or coarseness in the Lord Jesus. From birth to death He pleased not Himself and always did those things that pleased the Father. He is the measure. We are set apart to His obedience.

We shall not reach that measure here. But the day is coming when the old nature will be gone and we shall be in His image. And in that day there will never be a thought or a moment that is not for the pleasure of God. That is not a discouraging prospect — it is a glorious one, and it makes every present exercise to walk in dependence and obedience all the more worth pressing into.