

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Election and Free Grace

If you are a regular listener to *Truth for Today* will know that we have been steadily working through the chapters of a book entitled "*Salvation*", (ISBN: 978-0901860170) in a series called "Things which accompany salvation". The content of this book, "*Salvation*", originally appeared as two books, "*The Great Salvation*" and "*Outlines of Truth*", both written by the late Frank Binford Hole who was very active in Christian work in the early part of the last century. I thoroughly recommend this book to any who want to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the wonderful salvation God has provided for all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

In the previous two talks in this group of three talks we have looked at "Blood and Water" and "Grace and Discipleship". Today we have reached chapter 19, and the subject for our talk is "Election and Free Grace". The final three chapters, "Israel and the Church", "Worship and Service", and "The Rapture and the Appearing" will be the subject of future talks, in the Lord's will.

It is fair to say that our subject today has been the source of much controversy amongst Christians throughout the centuries. The great question is how can we reconcile the election or sovereign choice of God and the grace freely offered to all mankind? I certainly do not wish to add to that controversy today!

Firstly you will note that the title of our talk is "Election and Free Grace" and not "Election versus Free Grace". Rightly understood, there can be no conflict or struggle between these two biblical truths. We often remind ourselves that God is love (1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16), but we need also to remember that God is light (1 John 1:5). These seem to be opposing truths, God's absolute holiness and rejection of all things sinful, and His matchless love and forgiveness for us who are sinners. It is true that God is holy, and yet He is love, and He loves us so much that He sent His Son to die upon a cross so that we might have our sins forgiven.

Often seemingly opposing truths are illustrated by the picture of a rowing boat with two oars. I'm sure even those of you who have never had a go at rowing will appreciate that if you pull too hard on one oar and not enough on the other, you end up going round in circles. Our subject today, I suggest, is a bit like that. We need to balance the truth of election and the truth of free grace.

When I started to preach the Gospel in a public way, an older Christian said this to me, "Before you preach, pray knowing that it all depends on God, but as you preach, preach as if it all depends on you". I have always thought that these were wise words. In the assembly where I was brought up, the practice was to have a prayer meeting just prior to the Gospel meeting. I always thought that this was such a valuable time, especially if I was the preacher! How encouraging to hear so many pray that the message which was about to be given would be a blessing to those who would be gathered to hear it. As I think back to these days, I recall that it was often expressed in prayer, by men who were on their knees, that we are powerless even to cause a sinner to have anxious thoughts concerning their eternal salvation. The very fact that these men were on their knees in prayer, was evidence that they recognised that if sinners were to be saved, it could only be as a result of a work of God.

I want to begin today in a favourite passage of mine which will illustrate these two biblical truths. In Luke 15:1-32, the Lord Jesus tells a parable concerning the lost. I believe it to be one parable but in three parts.

1. The Lord Jesus speaks concerning the lost sheep and the shepherd who goes after it until it is found, bringing it safely home on his shoulders;
2. Then He speaks of the coin which was lost, and the diligence of the woman who sweeps the house until it is found; and
3. Then He tells us of the younger son, often called "the prodigal son", who was lost in the far country, but was found.

I was taught that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, or put another way, a natural story with a spiritual meaning. It is not difficult to understand these three natural stories, nor should it be difficult to understand what the Lord Jesus was teaching by this parable. You will note that the joy experienced when the lost was found was in "*heaven*" (Luke 15:7) and in the "*presence of the angels*" (Luke 15:10), which I take it means that the joy was God's

joy! In this parable, we see a picture of the Godhead, in relation to the salvation of the lost, and taking the three parts in the order they are given, I have summarised the parable in this way:

- The willingness of the Son, in going after the sheep which had lost its way;
- The work of the Spirit, in searching for the coin which had lost its value; and
- The welcome of the Father, who embraced the returning son, who was lost to the joy of the father's house.

Our subject today is Election and Free Grace, so let's keep this in mind as we look briefly at this parable.

Let us begin with the lost sheep. The prophet Isaiah writes, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way..."* (see Isaiah 53:6). Surely if we have been saved, we can relate to this, and with the hymn writer say,

"I once was lost, but now I'm found."

John Newton (1725-1807)

Perhaps the sheep knew it was lost, but it was powerless to find its way home. Perhaps we, too, whilst in our sins came to the point where we realised we were lost and at a distance from God, and realised that we were unable to do anything about that. The Lord Jesus Christ said, *"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep"* (see John 10:11). If the Son of God had not come from heaven, and died, shedding His blood on the cross of Calvary, we could never have been brought back to God. I believe this is the meaning of this part of the parable (Luke 15:1-7). The One who gave His life for the sheep, is the One who brings the sheep home on His shoulders, rejoicing (Luke 15:5-6). As His sheep we can sing,

*In tenderness He sought me,
Weary and sick with sin,
And on His shoulders brought me
Back to His fold again.
While angels in His presence sang,
Until the courts of heaven rang.*

*Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold!*

William Spencer Walton (1850-1906)

In the case of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), I suggest we have an illustration of the Holy Spirit's work in searching for the lost. I understand the natural explanation of the story is one of a missing coin in a tiara type piece, worn by the woman of the day. She would not wear it if there was a piece missing, so she diligently swept the house, with no thought at all of giving up the search, until it was found. The coin could have no concept of its lost condition, but the value was known to the One who searched for it. Note the lighting of a candle and the sweeping of the broom (Luke 15:8). These are works initiated by the woman to bring the coin out of its lost position in the darkness, without which the coin would have remained lost. I think this verse sums it up so well,

*We joy in our God, and we sing of that love,
So sovereign and free which did His heart move!
When lost our condition, all ruined, undone,
He saw with compassion, and spared not His Son!*

W Yerbury (d. 1863)

And in the story of the prodigal or lost son (Luke 15:11-32), we see rebellion in the heart of one who left home. But in the *"far country"* (Luke 15:13) circumstances brought him to the point of being *"in want"* (Luke 15:14), and we read that he *"came to himself"* (Luke 15:17). I know in the natural story we could well imagine the younger son making his long and wearisome journey back home from the far country. However, as we explore the spiritual meaning, it is amazing to discover that *"the far country"* (Luke 15:13) and *"a great way off"* (Luke 15:20) are synonymous terms. I believe we learn from this, that contrary to what we might imagine, the truth was that the moment the young man's heart was moved to return home, the Father's welcome embrace enfolded him, covering him with kisses. Note that he says, *"I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son"* (see Luke 15:21).

Repentance is so necessary if a sinner is to be forgiven and accepted by God. Perhaps this is your experience, just like the hymn writer,

*I've wandered far away from God,
Now I'm coming home;
The path of sin too long I've trod,
Lord, I'm coming home.*

*Coming home, coming home,
Never more to roam;
By Thy grace I will be Thine,
Lord, I'm coming home.*

William James Kirkpatrick (1838-1921)

So let's summarise what we have said about this parable, now in relation to our subject of election (or God's choice) and free grace (or man's responsibility). The Holy Spirit sheds light and searches for the lost ones. The Son has come and by His death and resurrection has made it possible for sinful man to be saved. The Father welcomes sinners who repent from their sins. No doubt as a consequence of the famine, which in itself was God's providential working, the younger son repented. The Gospel (or good news) of the grace of God is being preached today and mankind is responsible to God for what they do in relation to the Gospel. The Bible warns, "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*" (see Hebrews 2:3), but it also says, that it is "*the goodness of God*" which leads man to repentance (see Romans 2:4). And we read, "*for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*" (see Ephesians 2:8-9).

So let's remember the rowing boat with the two oars. God has a sovereign right to choose to bless me, but I need to repent and believe the Gospel. Is there any conflict there? I think not! Many years ago whilst driving past a church building, I saw a poster which read, "This church is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints". Although it was a clever and catchy sound-bite, I think perhaps they were pulling on one of the oars too strongly!

Now perhaps you may object and say that so far I have based most of what I have said on my interpretation of a parable. So, let us look at two examples of God's sovereign choice and of man's responsibility, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Turning in our Bibles to Exodus 12:1-28, we read that God gave Moses clear instructions regarding the Passover. The destroyer was going to pass through the land of Egypt, and the Israelites would only be saved if they followed God's instructions, slaying a lamb and sprinkling the blood upon the door posts and upper lintel. If you have not read this passage recently then make time to read it. On the Passover night, those who obeyed the word of the LORD, as spoken by Moses, left Egypt and its slavery. No doubt the responsibility fell upon the head of the house, but the instruction was to all the people. The requirement was to obey what God had said.

But if we turn back in our Bibles to the book of Genesis 15, we read some 400 years earlier that God had told Abram what would happen to "his seed". They would be strangers in a land that is not theirs, be servants and afflicted, but afterwards come out with great substance. Two hundred years would pass, and now God would tell Jacob what He would do. In Genesis 46:3, we read, "*And [God] said, I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again...*" Another 160 years would pass, but in God's time He would speak to His servant Moses out of the burning bush saying, "*I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey*" (see Exodus 3:7-8).

So we see that God had already decided what He would do, and what happened was all in His mind and purpose. The children of Israel would not be slaves in Egypt forever, but be brought into the Promised Land. However, knowing that it was God's purpose did not in any way lessen the obligation the people had to obey the word of God concerning the Passover lamb, and they would have been judged if they had not been obedient.

Now from Acts 8:26-40 let us consider the story of the Ethiopian who had travelled, perhaps as far as 1,000 miles, to worship at Jerusalem. He was not a Jew, but must have had some desire after the God of Israel. Did he hear about Jesus of Nazareth? Did he witness the crucifixion of Jesus, or hear of the resurrection? We don't know! But we do know that he had a copy of Isaiah's prophecy, and he was reading it even although he could not understand what he was reading. It would have been a sad story if it had ended there, with a man seeking after God but returning home none the wiser. But God had His eye on this man and sent Philip, the evangelist, to meet him in the desert.

Philip heard the Ethiopian read the words of the prophet Isaiah and asked him if he understood what he was reading. "How can I," he said, "except some man should guide me?". We read, "*The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth...*" When the Ethiopian asked Philip, "Of whom speaketh the prophet?", Philip preached Jesus to him. The man believed and was baptised and went on his way rejoicing (see Acts 8:26-40).

In my younger days I would hear older Christians say, "Wherever there is a seeking sinner, there's a seeking Saviour". JN Darby wrote, "God's ways are behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes which He is behind". I think these two stories which we have briefly looked at illustrate God's election (or sovereign choice) and also free grace (or man's responsibility).

For the short time we have left today, I want to quote some Bible verses which prove that these two truths, Election and Free Grace are scriptural and need not cause contention or concern. On the contrary, they should cause our hearts to well up in praise and adoration to our blessed God.

In John 17:1-26, we have the Son of God on earth, praying to His Father in heaven. He is speaking as if the cross had already taken place, and was looking forward to being glorified, in heaven, with His own. In John 17:2 we read, "*As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*" Let's think about that for a moment and what it is teaching us. The Father has given the Son power over all mankind, that the Son might give the gift of eternal life to those who have been given to the Son by the Father. At least seven times in this prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of those who have been given to Him by the Father. And that is not just those who were His disciples when He was in the world. John 17:20 speaks of "*those which shall believe on me*", and every Christian is included as the Son prays, "*Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world*" (John 17:24).

In Ephesians 1:3-4 we read, "*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 him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.*" Carefully read this again and marvel at the wonderful truth that the Father has blessed us, and chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world. I think the hymn writer sums it up beautifully when addressing God the Father he writes,

*Thou gav'st us, in eternal love,
To Him to bring us home to thee,
Suited to Thine own thought above,
As sons like Him, with Him to be.*

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

Dear listener, if you are a Christian, enjoy this most wonderful truth. The truth that in eternity, before the world was created, you were given to the Son by the Father as a love gift! If that doesn't cheer your heart, then I say nothing will!

But what of Free Grace and man's responsibility. Perhaps the best known Gospel text is John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" These are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, but He continues by saying in John 3:18, "*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*"

We read in Acts 17:30 that "*[God] commandeth all men everywhere to repent*", and that blessing is on the basis of "*repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (see Acts 20:21). This is the Gospel that the Apostle Paul preached, and we should be courageous in preaching it in our day and generation. Although we are not responsible for the results, for that is God's business, we should preach as if it depended on us, and pray knowing that it all depends on God.

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this *Truth for Today* talk on Things which accompany salvation, Election and Free Grace. Talk number, T1087.

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