

## Our Salvation Story, God's will and our will

Last week we started a new series entitled Our Salvation Story. I said it would be divided into three parts: what God does with us prior to our decision point for faith, things at that decision point, and things after. We then stepped back to get a view of why we needed salvation. We reviewed God's overall purpose in creating a kingdom for himself in which he would rule, we and his angels would be his subjects, and the heavens and the earth would be his domain. We then learned one of his angelic creations, Satan, rebelled as he wanted to take God's position and usurp his rule. Satan entered the garden and convinced Adam and Eve to join his rebellion and consequently, sin and death entered the world.

But God, foreseeing what had occurred, had a plan to make it right. In the course of time, God the Son would inhabit human flesh and provide himself as a substitute for the penalty of our sin. He would die on a cross fully absorbing the wrath and punishment that we deserved for our rebellion, and that through faith in that provision, we could once again recover our lost relationship with God.

Now it is obvious when we observe the world not everyone believes this. So, the question naturally arises; how is it that some come to faith and some do not? And for those who come to faith what process goes into that decision?

These questions were also on Paul's mind while discussing national Israel in Rm 9:6-24. Reading verse 7 we see God chose Isaac over Ishmael, and in verse 12 and 13, Jacob over Esau. In verse 15 He chose Moses for one destiny (mercy) and in verse 17, Pharaoh for another (destruction). Paul anticipates the readers' next question in verse 19. If God makes people, the way they are (in other words some to believe and some not to believe) how can God hold them responsible for their unbelief if God made them that way? It isn't fair!

Today we will begin a discussion to answer these questions for the answers involve several theological concepts that are operative before salvation and are mentioned in Rms 8:29-30, *for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*<sup>30</sup> *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Reading the verse, we see there are some key words: *foreknew* (or foreknowledge), *predestined* (or predestination), *conformed*, *called*, *justified*, and *glorified*. Now notice some of these refer to the time before we believe (*foreknowledge, predestined, called*) some refer to the time of faith (*justified*), and some refer to the time after we have come to faith (*conformed and glorified*). The three big theological words our verse mentions that deal with our time before coming to faith, *foreknowledge, predestined, and called*, also introduce three big theological concepts, foreknowledge, predestination, and election. I will discuss the notion of *calling* when we get to the section of our series on the decision point of faith.

Now, remember our two questions, how is it that some come to faith and some do not. And for us that come to faith what prompts that decision making process? In other words, what is God doing for us before we come to faith? To answer these questions, we are going look at five things these above verses touch on. Gods will, our will, foreknowledge, predestination, and election.

## God's Will

- a. Preferred Will: what He desires or prefers, 1 Tim 2:4, *who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

2 P 3:9, *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

- b. Prescribed and Proscribed Will: what He specifically prescribes (i.e. a positive command), Deut 6:5, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,* and proscribes or forbids (i.e. a negative command), see Ex 20:13, *You shall not murder.*
- c. His Sovereign Will: what He purposes to happen such as Acts 2:23, *This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,<sup>[d]</sup> put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

God had a plan before the world began

## Our Will

- a. Since we are made in the image of God, (Gen 1:26-27) we have a will.
- b. This means we are free to make choices (both in the material and moral realms).
- c. 1 Thess 5:23 says we are made of body, soul, and spirit. Our bodies are our physical selves. Our spirit is what relates us to God. Our soul consists of our emotions and mind (our will, conscience, and intellect).

Theologians have wrestled with this idea of who we are, and how we decide, and came up with the idea of faculty (in the sense of our mental composition) psychology. Basically, they said our minds (in the broadest sense) consisted of three independent yet fully interacting components consisting of emotions, will, and intellect corresponding to the Biblical idea of heart, soul, and mind. Renee Girard told us we are imitative creatures. So, what our eyes see, and our ears hear, informs the thoughts of our minds to imitate others. And these thoughts inform the heart, which create affection and attachments (in short, desire). These desires inform our will and conscience, and these dictate our actions.

- d. Therefore, our decisions are conditioned by the state of our hearts and the weight of our love. If we love goodness we will choose goodness. If we love other things, we will choose that.
- e. After the fall, our decision-making machinery became corrupted, so that the occupation of our minds and the state of our hearts became ourselves. We make decisions in our own self-interest.
- f. Nevertheless, despite the Fall, God has given us choice, and the freedom to freely choose Him and His ways. We are not automatons. God wants us to freely choose him and thus express our love and desire for him. Love coerced is not love.
- g. God is big enough to allow our free will and His sovereign plan to coexist with one another (Pr 16:9, *In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps*).

