

# DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM

## Ephesians 1:11-14

*This is a copy of the sermon preached by Dr. Paul Mims, Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church, October 2, 2011.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Senior, was a doctor. As such, he was very interested in the use of ether. In order to know how his patients felt under its influence, he once had a dose administered to himself.

As he was going under, in a dreamy state, a profound thought came to him. He believed that he had suddenly grasped the key to all the mysteries of the universe. When he regained consciousness, however, he was unable to remember what the insight was.

Because of the great importance this thought would be to mankind, Holmes arranged to have himself given ether again. This time he had a stenographer present to take down the great thought. The ether was administered, and sure enough, just before passing out, the insight reappeared. He mumbled the words, the stenographer took them down, and he went to sleep confident in the knowledge that he had succeeded.

Upon awakening, he turned eagerly to the stenographer and asked her to read what he had uttered. This is what she read: "The entire universe is permeated with a strong odor of turpentine." (Bits and Pieces)

Life is full of mysteries. Who can explain creation in detail? Does anyone know exactly what happens how the soul enters at conception? How do we perceive what happens at death?

The Bible also presents us with mystery. How can we ever comprehend to our satisfaction God's initiative in choosing us before the foundation of the world and also allowing us the freedom to choose for ourselves? This is the most controversial of all Christian doctrines. Attempts to explain it has led to theologians to adopt one extreme or the other. Both lead to divisions in the Christian community and result in an inadequate answer.

In my personal struggle with this, I have studied the history of the churches attempt to explain it and find both extremes lacking. If one says that our salvation is all divine sovereignty or if another says it is all free will, then both are inadequate. The only way to be true to the scriptures is to believe in both human freedom and divine sovereignty. And I must confess that this does not fully explain it for the love of God for sinners will remain a mystery until that time in eternity when we shall see all things clearly.

The best illustration to give us understanding of this mystery is that of standing outside of the church and seeing the invitation, "Whosoever will may come" written over the entrance. And then, when one has entered and looking back sees written over the doorposts, "Chosen before the foundation of the world." So it remains a mystery.

There are three concepts that interpret the mystery for us in this passage.

First,

### WE ARE PREDESTINATED FOR A PURPOSE.

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Verse 11. God chose Israel to be his special people for a purpose. He wanted a people through whom he could speak to the other nations through the prophets. His plan for them was to provide a lineage through which he would provide a savior for all the other nations. So, his choosing of Israel was not to the exclusion of all the other nations but eventually for their redemption

So, what is our purpose in being the elect? It is so that all the rest of humanity who are not yet redeemed may come into knowledge of God's glorious grace. And they become aware that they are the elect for the next generation. You did not know that you were one of the chosen until you walked under the arch of "whosoever" and looked back and saw "Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" did you? You are now in God's plan of world redemption and must be an evangel for the salvation of others.

“D.L. Moody made a covenant with God that he would witness for Christ to at least one person each day. One night, about ten o'clock, he realized that he had not yet witnessed; so he went out in to the street and spoke to a man standing by a lamppost, asking him, "Are you a Christian?" The man flew into a violent rage and threatened to knock Moody into the gutter. Later, that same man went to an elder in the church and complained that Moody was "doing more harm in Chicago than ten men were doing good." The elder begged Moody to temper his zeal with knowledge. Three months later, Moody was awakened at the YMCA by a man knocking at the door. It was the man he had witnessed to. "I want to talk to you about my soul," he said to Moody. He apologized for the way he had treated Moody and said that he had had no peace ever since that night on Lake Street when Moody witnessed to him. Moody led the man to Christ and he became a zealous worker in the Sunday school.” (Wiersbe)

## Second.

### WE HEARD THE GOSPEL AND BELIEVED OF OUR OWN FREE WILL.

Verse 13. “And you were also included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”

Think back on how you came to Christ. Everyone comes to him in different circumstances. But the common denominator is the hearing of the gospel and being drawn to its truth by the Holy Spirit, being convicted of your sin which you committed in your lostness, and believing Christ, who died to pay the penalty for your sin which caused you to be accepted by the Father as one of the redeemed. But even that faith, Paul tells us in 2:8, is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. God did everything in our salvation except turn our wills toward him. Only we could do that.

D.L. Moody said, “The elect are the ‘whosoever wills’ – the non- elect are the ‘whosoever won’ts.’” The term “elect” is always used in scripture of those who have already believed and never of those who have not yet believed.

Divine sovereignty and human freedom are likened to two ropes going through a pulley in the ceiling. If you wish to lift yourself you cannot pull on just one rope, you have to lift yourself up on both. So it is with the concepts of God’s sovereignty and our freedom. With strong faith we cling to both in understanding our great salvation.

Then, he placed his divine seal upon us to mark us forever as his children. That seal is the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells every Christian. This is how the Spirit in me identifies with the Spirit in you and gives us that blessed fellowship in our faith. We are one in the Spirit.

Gordon Brownville's [Symbols of the Holy Spirit](#) tells about the great Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, the first to discover the magnetic meridian of the North Pole and to discover the South Pole. On one of his trips, Amundsen took a homing pigeon with him. When he had finally reached the top of the world, he opened the bird's cage and set it free. Imagine the delight of Amundsen's wife, back in Norway, when she looked up from the doorway of her home and saw the pigeon circling in the sky above. No doubt she exclaimed, "He's alive! My husband is still alive!"

So it was when Jesus ascended. He was gone, but the disciples clung to his promise to send them the Holy Spirit. What joy, then, when the dovelike Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost. The disciples had with them the continual reminder that Jesus was alive and victorious at the right of the Father. This continues to be the Spirit's message.

## Third.

### WE ARE CHOSEN FOR GOD’S PRAISE.

Verse 14. “...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.”

There are three dimensions of salvation expressed in three tenses: having been saved, are being saved, shall be saved. We were saved when we believed which is called REGENERATION; we are being saved which is called SANCTIFICATION; we shall be saved which is called GLORIFICATION. These verses speak of all three dimensions of our salvation which results in the redeemed of the ages praising God for his great love for us so freely bestowed in Christ.

A body is not crippled 'til its heart has ceased to praise. Louis Albert Banks tells of an elderly Christian man, a fine singer, who learned that he had cancer of the tongue and that surgery was required. In the hospital after everything was ready for the operation, the man said to the doctor, "Are you sure I will never sing again?" The surgeon found it difficult to answer his question. He simply shook his head no. The patient then asked if he could sit up for a moment. "I've had many good times singing the praises of God," he said. "And now you tell me I can never sing again. I have one song that will be my last. It will be of gratitude and praise to God." There in the doctor's presence the man sang softly the words of Isaac Watts' hymn, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,/ And when my voice is lost in death,/ Praise shall employ my nobler power;/ My days of praise shall ne'er be past,/ While life, and thought, and being last,/ Or immortality endures."

As a child, I was exposed to the gospel. My grandfather Mims was a minister. Grandfather Moore was a deacon. In our home we would gather around the piano in the parlor and sing the hymns of the faith. I knew that I was to be a minister long before I became a professing Christian. I was reading my Bible, praying, going to Sunday School, attending worship, years before I finally, at age fourteen by an act of my will, gave my life to Christ and was baptized. I saw my awayness from God and my lostness and I could not stand it any longer. I had to settle my relationship to God for he had come after me. Now, I am privileged to be a part of the chorus that sings, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor and glory and majesty and power." Praise be to his name!