

# Standing on the Promises

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

## Introduction

"*The faith of God's Elect*" (Titus 1:1).

Election (the doctrine that God, before the creation of the world, chose in Christ all those who will be saved, Ephesians 1:4) is one of the most comforting doctrines in Scripture. However, election can also be a most unsettling doctrine as seen in the various reactions to it.

Some ignore the doctrine asserting that it is a mysterious secret that should be left alone (Deuteronomy 29:29). True, election is a mystery, but it is no secret (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Refusing to search out or to joyfully embrace God's truth is to cast suspicion on God's wisdom in revealing the truth.

Other people reject the doctrine because they see it as interfering in their autonomy. Sinful humans want the right to be in control of their own destiny—to make their own choices. Such an attitude merely reveals the iniquitous spirit that characterizes fallen humanity. Salvation requires a humbling and submission to the will of God. (2 Peter 4:5, 6).

Others, however, avoid election because it causes them distress—"What if I am not elect?" This is probably the prime reason for ignorance of the doctrine. It is for this group that this article was written. Our purpose is to answer this concern from a biblical perspective. If you are troubled with election, please consider:

## Salvation Is Offered on Gospel Terms

"*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*" (John 6:37).

Both election and gospel truths are set forth in the above verse. Election concerns those who will come to Christ: "*All that the Father gives me will come to me.*" The gospel concerns the process of their actually coming to Christ: "*whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*" So the issue is not whether one is elect (which is God's business), but whether one has come to Christ as a sinner seeking the mercy of the Savior (which is the sinner's business).

Repentance and faith are commanded in Scripture. The sinner is responsible to repent of his sin and believe the gospel. "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (Acts 16:31). In his commentary on Romans, Dr. William R. Newell tells of his once asking a man about his relationship to Christ. The man laughed and said, "If I am elect, I will go to heaven, and if I am not elect, there is no use in my worrying about the question!" Newell responded by quoting Acts 17:30: "*God . . . now commands all people everywhere to repent.*" He then sternly rebuked the man, "You will not dare to say to God in [the judgment] day, I could not come because I was not of the elect; for that will not be true! The reason you refuse to come will be found in your love of sin, not your nonelection!" (*Romans, Verse by Verse*, p. 370).

The sinner's concern should not be *election*, but *sin*. It is not whether God is being fair in choosing only some for salvation, but whether the sinner has humbled himself in repentance before his offended God. Salvation is not a *right* of sinners, but rather a *gift* of the Savior. Therefore, if God has wrought conviction in your soul and revealed the hope of salvation to your heart, then, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*"

"But," you may ask, "what if I have believed, what is my assurance?" It is this: if you have come to Christ in repentance and faith, He has *promised* that He will *not* cast you out!

## **Assurance from God's Word**

*"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God"* (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Would you desire to *know* your election of God? While the demonstration of *election* to salvation is believing the gospel (2 Timothy 2:13), assurance must be based on more than just the act of believing (James 2:19). It is not enough to say, "I accepted Christ on such-and-such a date." Assurance of salvation is based on three things: (1) reliance on God's promises, (2) a changed life, and (3) the witness of the Holy Spirit. All three work together in order that *"you may know that you have eternal life"* (1 John 5:13).

### **1. Reliance on God's Promises**

God has given to us many wonderful promises in His Word which assure us that God will do what He says He will do. Promises are a means to trust God because He is true and faithful. Our assurance of salvation rests on that fact.

It should be noted, however, that promises do not imply any natural ability for a person to come to God on his own (John 6:44, 65). Sinners are by nature at enmity with God and therefore cannot and will not trust Him (John 5:40, 42; Romans 8:7). Rather, promises are given to those in whom God works His grace as the means of hope (Psalm 110:3; Jeremiah 24:7). In order for us to trust God, two things must happen:

(1) God must give us *hope* by His promises. *"For we are saved by hope"* (Romans 8:24). (2) We must trustingly wait for His promises to be fulfilled. *"We do with patience wait for it"* (Romans 8:25). Search His Word, find His promises, and claim them for yourself. God's people learn to value His promises above the temporal blessings of this life (Psalm 19:10-11; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

### **2. A Changed Life of Holiness**

*"Pursue . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Hebrews 12:14).

God's purpose in salvation is to restore His own people to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28-30). This means leaving the paths of self and sin and walking a new road of holiness before God. Salvation is not "fire insurance" to protect the "saved" sinner while he continues on in his own sinful way.

Essentially, holiness is defined as "separateness"—being set apart unto God (1 Corinthians 6:17-7:1). But holiness also involves a love and longing for God and His ways. Salvation is evidenced by love-response that causes the believer to desire God with all his heart (Deuteronomy 6:4, 5; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 16:22). We naturally loathe submitting to God. But, if we love Him, we will cherish Him and the things which He loves and desires for us (Psalm 63; Philippians 2:12, 13). It is this hunger to love, to please, and to glorify God that demonstrates our changed life (John 14:15, 21, 23-25).

God's purpose is for us *"to be conformed to the image of his son"* (Romans 8:28). As the Son was a joy and delight to His Father (John 8:29; Luke 3:22; John 4:34; 14:31; 17:4; Hebrews 5:8), so God desires for His children to be His joy and delight. As Christ glorified the Father (John 17:4), so His children are to glorify God in fellowship and obedience (1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

### **3. The Witness of God's Spirit**

*"And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us"* (1 John 3:24).

The greatest privilege of the Christian is to have the indwelling presence of God's Spirit to bring about God's purpose in him. The Holy Spirit is *"a comforter"* (*paracletos*)—one called to our side to assist the believer in his spiritual walk (John 14:16). Jesus described

Him as the One who would be *"in you."* His ministry would be to give the Christian the knowledge of his relationship with God (John 14:20).

The Holy Spirit *"bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God"* (Romans 8:16). But how does He witness to us? Much modern teaching on the Holy Spirit focuses on feelings and experiences. But the Bible teaches that the witness of the Spirit is *objective* rather than *subjective*—that is, the evidence of His work is not *feelings* but *conformity* to the standards set forth in the Word of God: *"These things have I written unto you"* (1 John 5:13). As the Spirit confirms one's standing and privileges from the Word, the believer gains assurance of his salvation, for *"God has revealed them to us by his Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

If you have doubts about your standing with God, it may be that you lack sufficient evidence of the kind of results God's Word declares to be the marks of genuine conversion. You should to be brutally honest with yourself. However, do not look for sinless perfection. Believers are only now *becoming* like Christ (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14).

On the other hand, the fact that you are seriously concerned about your relationship to God, is, in itself, evidence that God is working in you, for *"the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."* (1 Corinthians 2:14). The fact that you are concerned is a work of God's mercy and grace.

### **Conclusion**

There is no reason for any Christian to be alarmed about his election. Our dealings with God center in those areas where He has given us responsibility—to repent of sin and believe the gospel. Our assurance rests on the same ground. He has promised that if we will come to Christ, He will not turn us away. Our continuing assurance comes as our lives conform to the standards and purposes God has revealed in His Word. Charles Spurgeon wrote:

If thy bowels begin to yearn towards the Father, whom thou has angered and aggrieved, and if thy feet desire to leave the mountains of sin and vanity, and to tread the right road, it is a Father's hand that draws thee, it is a Savior's voice that sweetly impels thee to seek His face . . . ." (from the Sermon, "High Doctrine").