

Sermon 85: Objections: Hindrance to praise, prayer and evangelism

OUTLINE

Praise

Prayer

Evangelism

The next most common objection is that the logical implication of the doctrine of free election is that we will lose all motivation in worship, prayer and evangelism. Our worship will be tarnish and soured because we no longer think of God as loving every person without exception. Our prayer is deflated because if God is going to do His will anyway why should we pray? And likewise, if God will save His elect we don't need to evangelize. Each of these objections we will see if another case of applying logic to a misunderstood position not the teaching of Scripture.

Praise

Firstly, is worship consistent with the teaching of a God who is sovereign, who freely chooses to elect some and not others to salvation? Can we worship a God who free has mercy on some and not all, and in justice leaves other sin their sins? If we look at Matt. 11:25-27 we see Jesus is able to worship a God who only saves some, 'At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'" And listen to Paul speak about God who elects some to salvation, hear his conclusion at the end of a 3 chapter discussion on election, Romans 11:33-36, 'Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen.'

It is not reprehensible to worship a God of distinguishing love when you understand Him correctly. Is it wrong to worship God because He saves some sinners who deserve hell? Is it wrong to praise God for His justice when He refuses to save others on account of their sin? Is it wrong to praise the god who saves you when there was absolutely nothing in you which merited saving, and if God gave you your just deserts you should have received eternal punishment? No, and No! The doctrine of election teaches us about the God of mercy and justice, the God saves the unworthy. This is the teaching which brings us into true worship, for we are not worshipping a figment of our imagination, a God who we find

palatable to reason, who is our love slave and arranges Himself around our free will. No here we learn our true and desperate condition, our total helplessness and how undeserving we are. It is here that we see how loving God actually is, for He loved those who He did not have to, those who deserved the opposite of worship. We cannot complain because we believe in a God who freely chooses to be merciful to the unrighteous and just to the sinners. We cannot say, 'I object to God not saving all, that is just!' No it is when we see that none deserved to be saved that we appreciate and can truly praise God's free grace and mercy. We do not worship a God who had to love us, but who chose to love some of the unworthy and glorify His justice in leaving the others in their sin. This is the teaching that magnifies God and encourages worship; this is the teaching which roots out worship that worships a figment of our own imagination. Let me challenge you, can you worship a God who has mercy on the undeserving and who magnifies His justice by passing over some? If not then you are not worshipping like Christ and like Paul, and there is something seriously wrong with your view of God.

Prayer

If God is able to make His will come to pass then why do we have to pray? If God is free in His will and we make no contribution to purposes then why we pray? If we believe in a doctrine of a sovereign God whose will will inevitably be done will this not steal all our motivation to pray? This is not so much a theological argument against election as it is a logical fear that the teaching of a sovereign God who sovereignly elects will empty prayer meetings and rob us of our desire to pray. I also see that this is not a main concern for the majority of Arminians but more of the Semi-Pelagians. It has been pointed out by Calvinists that everyone is a Calvinist on their knees. Packer makes the point that we betray our belief in God's sovereignty when we thank God for our salvation, and when we ask God to save others. I might add that we believe in God's sovereignty when we ask Him to sway the hearts of those in government to His will.

I remember this being one of the things that I tried to fight off God's sovereignty with. In Charismatic Word of Faith theology God gave dominion to man and man gave it to the devil, now God can't do anything to interfere in this world's affairs unless we grant Him the permission through prayer. God can't do anything unless we first pray! In this view of the sovereignty of God prayer has real power of itself and we empower God and He needs our help to get His will done. We would call this blasphemous and the highest insult against God. It is also a blatant contradiction to the teaching of the Bible.

Prayer is not something that God needs, but something that God in His sovereign determination has chosen to employ as a means to bring His will to pass. Prayer is a privilege not a power we yield. God condescends when He responds to our prayers, He is indulging us, not we indulging Him. God does us the favour and exalt our standing by putting us into His employ using our half-hearted, self-infiltrated, ignorant prayers as means of bringing His perfect and sovereign will to pass. Just because God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick we should not think that the straight line is because of us but because of Him.

The doctrine of election and God's sovereignty is in fact an impetus not a hindrance to prayer. We come to prayer knowing that people can be saved, governments can be influenced, situations can be changed, revivals can be sent, and much more all because God in His magnanimity has deemed it fit, by His sovereignty to use sinners prayers. He perfects our prayers by Christ's righteousness, He informs them by His word, He brings our own desires into conformity to His by His indwelling Spirit, and even then they are not worthy of answer, God is not obliged to answer, but in His grace He chooses to do so. When it comes to prayer we exaggerate our own importance, we are like the child who helps his mother make a cake. He puts egg shells into the mixture which his mother must fish out. He has to have her hand over his in all the measuring and pouring. All his messes are cleaned up by her. She reads out the recipe, retrieves the ingredients from the shop then the cupboard, turns on the stove, sets the timer, greases the pan and puts on the finishing touches. And when the cake is ready the young child shouts to his father, 'Daddy I made a cake.' Our prayers are important because God chose them as a means but we exaggerate their importance and make them a necessity to God as if He could not have done His will without them. That said we must now stress that God has commanded us to offer our sinful feeble prayers; that God promises to hear our imperfect prayers in Christ's name and to pour out heavens power in response to our pathetic efforts. This is an encouragement to prayer not a hindrance. To know that my sinful prayers will be used by a holy God, to know that my weak efforts are used as a lever to move mountains, to think that people's eternities are impacted by my participation in asking for what God instructs is an encouragement not a discouragement to pray.

We dare not allow logic lead us down the silly road of thinking that God cannot be sovereign because He answers prayer and commands us to pray in order that things might come to pass. And we dare not reason that any stress on God's sovereignty must be rejected because then prayer should then logically become useless. This is a forced and uninformed logic. The bible commands us to pray, but we must be careful to infer from this that God must not then be sovereign.

Evangelism

The third issue to think about is how the doctrine of election relates to our responsibility to evangelize. There are those who would contend that the doctrine of election is a killer of evangelism and missions. If you believe that God will save His elect then this will lead to the church neglecting evangelism, not pursuing it.

Let us begin by saying that this has been the way some Hyper-Calvinists have thought, but that it is not the thinking of the majority of those who hold to the Reformed distinctives. There have been those who using logic and not Scripture as their guide have wrongly concluded that evangelism is not important, that sinners are not to obey the command to believe and repent, but rather to try and ascertain by some inward evidence that they are elect. Our response would be that this is simply the opposite reactionary error to Arminianism, both are opposite extremes of the same problem, using logic and not Scripture as their guide.

We believe that the bible is very clear in Christ's Great Commission to the church that it is the church's responsibility to preach the Gospel. We see ourselves as part of that group of believers who believe in a sovereign God who uses the means of our prayers and evangelism to bring His will to pass, that He does not bypass these appointed means. We see ourselves in the tradition of great Reformed Christians like William Carey, the Reformed Baptist who is seen as the Father of modern missions who argued for the ongoing need for evangelism. When he wrote a book to argue for the ongoing obligation the church has to the gospel, he argued that the great commission was not only for the apostles, but an ongoing obligation. He gave these seven reasons against naysayers arguing for an ongoing obedience to the Great Commission.

Firstly, if we believe that this command was for the apostles only, then we should not be baptising either.

Secondly, if it was for the apostles only then all missionaries who have ever gone out have done so without authority and in disobedience to God.

Thirdly, if Christ's presence is promised till the end of the age, then surely the command endures until then.

Fourthly, the command is not a ceremonial law that has run its course, nor a law that we are released from because the conditions are met. Nor is there any counter revelation to say this command is no longer to be obeyed, nor is it impossible to obey.

Fifthly, some have argued that we should wait for providence, but the door has already been entered by the Catholics and Moravians and they have been successful, and the traders in love of money have ventured into these dangerous situations. Surely we should be willing to risk more for the love of God and souls?

Sixthly, some teachers are saying that there needs to be an outpouring of the Spirit in another Pentecostal show of signs first. However, success in the Gospel until now proves that to be false.

Seventhly, those who say that we have enough work at home to do. They are right but it shouldn't be a case of either or, but both and.

We understand that the Spirit uses the word to draw sinners to faith in Christ, that the Spirit works with and not apart from the word. It is for this reason that we believe we must go, and we believing that God will save His people.

We believe that we can go into the most difficult situations amongst the most unlikely people to convert with the confidence that God can save His people no matter where they are. We know that our meagre efforts will bring about conversions because it is God who ensures the outcome. We are weak but He is strong and He will call His people to Himself, His sheep will hear His voice and be saved.

So as we consider whether the doctrine of election hinders or enhances worship, prayer and evangelism. We emphatically say that the doctrine of election make us more grateful for saving us, more reliant upon Him in prayer and expectant knowing that it is His chosen instrument, and confident that evangelism will bring about results.