

## ***On Election and Particular Atonement in the Gospel Call***

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*excerpt from On the Holy Spirit, Book V, chap. II.*

*modernized by William H. Gross [www.onthewing.org](http://www.onthewing.org) Sep 2015*

(1.) The decree of *election*, considered *absolutely* in itself, without respect to its *effects*, is no part of God's *revealed will*; that is, it is not revealed that this or that man is or is not elected. This, therefore, cannot be made either argument or objection against anything in which faith or obedience is concerned. For we do not know it; we cannot know it; it is not our duty to know it; knowledge of it is not proposed as useful to us — indeed, it is our sin to inquire into it. It may seem to some to be like the tree of knowledge of good and evil seemed to Eve: good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and much to be desired to make one wise. All secret, forbidden things seem so to carnal minds. But men can gather no fruit from this tree except death. See Deu 29.29.<sup>1</sup> Whatever exceptions, therefore, are laid against this decree as it is in itself, whatever inferences are made on supposing this or that about a man being elected or not, they are all unjust and unreasonable. Indeed, they are proud contentions with God, who has appointed another way for discovering it, as we will see afterward.

(2.) God sends the *gospel* to men in pursuit of his *decree of election*, and in order for its effectual accomplishment. I do not dispute what other end it has or may have, in its indefinite proposal to all; but this is the first, regulating, and principal end of it. Therefore, in preaching it, our apostle affirms that he "endured all things for the sake of the elect, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," 2Tim 2.10. So beforehand, God commanded Paul to stay and preach the gospel at Corinth, because "he had many people in that city," — namely, in his purpose of grace, Acts 18.10. See chap. 2.47, 13.48.<sup>2</sup>

(3.) Wherever this *gospel comes*, it proposes *life and salvation* by *Jesus Christ* to all who will *believe, repent*, and yield *obedience* to him. It plainly makes known to men their duty, and it plainly proposes to them their reward. In this state of things, no man, without the highest pride and utmost effect of unbelief, can oppose the secret decree of God as to our known duty. Such a proud one says, "I will neither repent, nor believe, nor obey, unless I may first know whether I am elected or not; for all at last will depend on that." If this is the resolution of any man, he may go about his business, for the gospel has nothing to say or offer to him. If he will accept it on no other terms than that he may set up his own will, and wisdom, and methods, in opposition to and in exclusion of those of God, he must, for all I know, take his own course, which he may repent of when it is too late.

(4.) The *sole way* of God's appointment by which we may come to apprehend an interest in *election*, is by the *fruits* of it in our *own souls*; nor is it lawful for us to inquire into it or after it in any other way. The obligation which the gospel puts upon us to believe anything, respects the order of the things themselves that are to be believed, and the order of our obedience, as observed before. For instance, when it is declared that Christ died for sinners, no man is immediately obliged to believe that Christ died for him in particular, but only that Christ died to save sinners, to procure a way of salvation for them, and he finds himself to be among them. On this the gospel requires faith and obedience from men; they are obliged to comply with this. Until this is done,

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<sup>1</sup> **Deu 29:29** "The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we may do* all the words of this law.

<sup>2</sup> **Act 2:47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. **Act 13:48** Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

no man is under an obligation to believe that Christ died for him in particular. So it is in this matter of election. A man is obliged to believe the doctrine of election on the first promulgation of the gospel, because it is plainly declared in this; but as for his own *personal* election, he cannot believe it, nor is he obliged to believe it, in any other way than as God reveals it by its *effects*. No man should, no man can justly question his own election, doubt it, or disbelieve it, until he is in such a condition that it is impossible for the effects of election to ever be worked in him, if there is such a condition in this world. For just as a man can have no evidence that he is elected while he is unholy, so he can have no evidence that he is *not* elected while it is still possible that he may ever be holy. This is why, whether men are elected or not, is not what God calls any to be immediately conversant about. Faith, obedience, holiness, are the inseparable fruits, effects, and consequents of election, as proved before. See Eph 1.4; 2Thes 2.13; Tit 1.1; Acts 13.48. In whomever these things are worked, he is obliged, according to the method of God and the gospel, to believe his own election. And any believer may have the same assurance of his election, as he has of his calling, sanctification, or justification; for these things are inseparable. And by the exercise of grace are we obliged to secure our interest in election, 2Pet 1.5-10.<sup>3</sup>

But as for those who are as yet unbelievers and unholy, they can draw no conclusion that they are *not* elected except from this supposition: that they are in a state and condition in which it is impossible for them to ever have either grace or holiness; and this cannot be supposed concerning any man, except one who knows he has sinned against the Holy Ghost. [Mat 12.31](#)

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<sup>3</sup> **2Pet 1:10** Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;