

You Did Not Choose Me

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain. (Jn 15:16)

It is difficult to understand how any evangelical can hold Arminian, free-will ideas about salvation in the light of multitudes of clear texts like this one. Can anything be more plain? We did not choose Christ, but he chose us. Disciples of Christ are chosen by Christ; man never takes the initiative in the things of God. Whether it is an apostle (Acts 22:14) or ordinary members of a small church (2 Thess 2:13), salvation is in the hands of God and not men. God is sovereign in salvation, he chooses those who will receive mercy, 'Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens' (Rm 9:21).¹

This setting apart in God's choice took place in eternity (Eph 1:4-5). God loved us before we were born and then caused us to love him, 'We love Him because He first loved us' (1 Jn 4:19). The choosing occurred in eternity, 'Before you were born I sanctified you' [set you apart from others] (Jer 1:5). So how on earth can anyone say that man chooses God, that man makes a decision for Christ, that salvation depends upon man's free-will? Yet such theology is common. The Hyper Arminian Billy Graham organisation² even calls its in house journal *Decision* since man's choosing of God is the keystone of its Gospel message. It is commonplace to hear congregations told that, 'now is the time of decision', 'make a decision to follow Christ now', 'it is up to you to accept or reject God', and such like.

The words of the Lord Jesus in this verse demonstrate the folly of such talk; this is not the Biblical Gospel. We can only receive Christ when God draws us to him (Jn 6:44, 65), and this choosing leads to fruitfulness. Let's look further at the Lord's words.

16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

17 "These things I command you, that you love one another.

18 " If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you.

19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I **chose** you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

21 "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

22 "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

23 "He who hates Me hates My Father also.

¹ What about the objection that Christ also chose Judas, who was damned, **Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?** (Jn 6:70). Well the Lord himself tells us that this was a divine requirement to fulfil scripture (Jn 13:18) and also to ensure that Christ was betrayed and led to the cross. Judas was selected for a specific purpose that led to his condemnation. Those that bear fruit for God are only those who are chosen by God.

² Sadly Billy Graham has strayed from evangelical Arminianism into believing that sincere followers of any god, in any faith, will go to heaven. This has been stated publicly in televised interviews. See for instance: Interview with Robert Schuller, *Evangelical Times*, Feb 1998; *Standard Bearer*, 15.12.97. Graham also praised Sir John Marks Templeton who promotes occultic religion [*The Berean Call*, May 1998] and endorsed the pope [*Chicago Tribune*, 8.6.63.].

24 "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.

25 "But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'

Jn 15:16-25

Appointing

Choosing is followed by appointing. Disciples are first chosen by God and then tasked with a job. Conversion is not the end of the matter but the beginning. Appoint here means, to lay down, to set, to fix, to ordain; we have been ordained by God for a job, just as a minister of the crown is appointed to a specific ministry in government. The choosing is followed by an appointment that leads to a strenuous task to be completed.

Going

The ordaining leads to a sending out, a going; there is movement, activity. Disciples do not sit on their hindquarters doing nothing with their newly received spiritual life. They are appointed and then sent out. Conversion is not joining a holy club that exists for self-pleasure; disciples are not meant to just have happy subjective feelings in church once a week and then do nothing. They are tasked to follow Christ, who himself was sent to the lost sheep of Israel.

Fruit-bearing

The ordaining leads to fruitfulness. The 'going out' is the way this fruitfulness is obtained.

Jesus has said much about fruitfulness in the earlier part of this chapter. Indeed, bearing fruit is a key indicator of discipleship according to the Lord here (Jn 15:8). If someone does not bear any fruit they cannot be a true disciple. There is no option here, disciples bear fruit, non-disciples wither and are cast out into the fire (Jn 15:2, 6).

The key to great fruitfulness is abiding in Christ. Anyone who dwells in Christ will bear fruit just as a branch on a healthy vine will always bear fruit. Those closest to the Lord will bear much fruit (Jn 15:4, 5).

How does fruit appear? For a plant to bear fruit there has to be growth to maturity. If there is no growth, there will be no fruit. If someone does not grow in Christ, we have to question whether they are a true disciple.

For growth there has to be nourishment. Without food and water there will be no development and no reproduction. For a disciple, food and water represents the life giving benefits of the Holy Spirit's ministry, fellowship with other believers, prayer, meditation of God and the studying of God's word.

A further requirement is activity. In human development exercise is critical to normal growth; without exercise muscles will atrophy and wither. Even in the plant kingdom there is constant inner activity as the continual processes of photosynthesis and osmosis take place inside plant cells. Disciples of Christ need to exercise their spiritual muscles or they will also atrophy. 'Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil' (Heb 5:14). The word 'exercise' here is the word *gumnazo*,³ which means to exercise naked in the Greek school of athletics, hence to exercise vigorously. It is where we get our word gymnasium from.

³ **gumna,zw** *gumnazo*, Strong's 1128.

Note that a key exercise is to discern between good and evil. It is vital that disciples understand truth so that they can identify error and act accordingly. Without combating error, disciples will be led astray. The key task in a pastor's ministry is not just to lead sheep into good pasture, but also to defend from wolves, lions and bears. Leaders who do not confront error and contend for the faith will damage the sheep just as much as if they did not feed them. Unless sheep are protected and warned, they will have no guidance and will then be led astray by every wind of doctrine.

When a disciple is nourished properly and exercises his mind he will grow to maturity quickly. When disciples develop and mature they will become fruitful. The choosing always leads to maturity and fruit-bearing.

Fruit remaining

The proof of true fruit-bearing is that the fruit remains.

It is so easy to manipulate audiences by various means and then snap pictures of hundreds of people standing up to make a decision to be converted. The genuineness of the ministry is whether these crowds of people are still following Christ ten years later. The truth about such ministry is that their 'converts' do not stand. The fruit does not remain. This is even freely admitted by the promoters themselves. Charles Finney, the first promoter of decisionism and coming forward to demonstrate a decision, admitted that most of his converts fell away and less than 10% were true. The Billy Graham organisation admitted that over 95% of people who came forward did not continue. The crowds who have responded through generations of the Charismatic Movement have vanished since church census reports show that congregations are now at their lowest ever point in UK history.

The proof of true ministry is shown in history in the works of godly men who preached a true Biblical Gospel and saw genuine converts continue throughout many years in the pastorate. It is interesting that the large congregations usually disappear when the godly minister dies. Through godly effort John Angel James saw nearly 2,000 attend his chapel for more than one meeting every Sunday in the backwaters of Birmingham in the 1800s. When he died the genuine work died, the numbers rapidly diminished and the church became liberal. It is the true disciple that bears fruit, not his methods, his church, his people, his techniques, his preaching. It is the man that bears fruit.

Those who are not chosen

Notice what Jesus has to say about the people that he does not choose.

- They hate Christ; 'it [the world] hated Me before *it hated you*' (Jn 15:18, 23, 24, 25).
- They hate God; 'they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father' (Jn 15:23-24).
- They hate Christ's disciples; 'the world hates you' (Jn 15:18, 19).
- Those chosen are not of the world, they are of a different order of humanity; 'you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world' (Jn 15:19). Those not chosen are not like us.
- They persecuted Jesus; 'they persecuted Me' (Jn 15:20).
- They will persecute us; 'they will also persecute you' (Jn 15:20).
- They do not know God; 'they do not know Him who sent Me' (Jn 15:21).
- They are sinners without any excuse for their sin; 'they have no excuse for their sin' (Jn 15:22).

Those chosen are worlds apart from those not selected.

Conclusion

The Lord himself chooses those who will be his disciples, and these elect people are chosen in eternity to be loved by God and called to his glory. Once called they are appointed to serve God by going and bearing fruit. True disciples will always bear fruit and their fruit will last.

What is this fruit?

Just as an apple tree will bear apples, a disciple of Christ will reproduce Christ. This primarily means two things.

Firstly, a disciple will witness to the death, resurrection, ascension and glory of Christ and persuade people to seek the Lord for mercy. As people are converted by his explanation of the Gospel, so fruit is born. Another person is united to Christ and becomes a witness to the Lord himself.

Secondly, it means that Christ will be resurrected out of his life. When a true disciple bears fruit, Christ will be seen in all that he does. His praying speaks of Christ, his preaching is Christ speaking, his character manifests Christ, his passion for souls expresses Christ, his love reveals Christ, everything he does brings a fragrance of the Lord to the people around him. When we are inspired to greater love and good works after fellowshiping with a godly person, fruit has been born through their character and ministry.

These two factors are more vital than ever today. We need to emphasise that the true Gospel message is founded on God's sovereignty, He chooses us, we do not decide to follow him from our own free-will. He calls us, he empowers us, he gives grace to believe and repent, and he changes our heart. The Gospel we preach is crucial and we must not diminish God's glory by preaching an unbiblical message.

Finally, we are called to bear fruit. Disciples that do not bear fruit, that do not witness, that do not bear the fragrance of Christ in their lives are not disciples at all. We must take every step to nurture ourselves and edify each other. We must feed on Christ by obeying his word and understanding his teaching. We must ensure that we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit. We must be constant in prayer and often meditating on the things of God. We have no choice in this, it is what true disciples do. Do we feel we have insufficient time - then examine how you spend your time. How much is wasted watching television? How much is spent in sport or hobbies? Physical exercise and relaxation are important, but not as important as training in godliness.

May we have the same spirit as the great apostle Paul,

I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.

(Phil 3: 12-15)

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Appendix

The false argument of Arminius

Arminius, based upon things he learned from Jesuit teachings, developed a compromise between human free-will and God's sovereignty. Seeking to affirm human ability in choosing Christ, he said that divine election was based upon what man did in the future. Thus divine foreknowledge was merely God seeing what men would do in the future, that they would choose Christ, and thus he chose these in eternity. This is now commonly accepted.

Firstly, Scriptural mention of God's foreknowledge means much more than prescience; it is an actual fellowship that bears fruit. It is similar to the OT use of the word 'know' when used of a man with his wife (Gen 4:1). In fact, Scripture links foreknowledge with foreordination. In 1 Pt 1:2, *prognosis* is translated as 'foreknowledge' but means both 'forethought' and 'pre-arrangement'. In 1 Pt 1:28 the word *proginosko* (from the same root) is translated as 'foreordained' and means 'to know beforehand' and also 'to predestine'.

Secondly, if Arminius is right then God is not sovereign in his choosing. For Arminius, it is man who makes the executive decision not God. God merely corroborates the future decision that a man makes. This is not sovereignty at all.

The overwhelming NT teaching is that man is unable to choose God at all. He can do no spiritual good and can only choose evil (Rm 3:10-18). He is dead in sin and a dead man cannot choose God (Eph 2:1). Finally, God has to draw men to Christ first and then give them grace to believe (Jn 6:44, 65). No man ever chose Christ from his own initiative or strength. God chooses the elect in eternity, by his good pleasure alone, and this choosing leads to them believing in the future (2 Thess 2:13).

The argument of Arminius is not only a lie, but it destroys the clear teaching of many Bible passages.

Of Him you are in Christ Jesus. 1 Cor 1:30

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 2 Thess 2:13

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