

Sermon #969: 2 Peter 1:1-11

6-17-12 (Trinity 2, 3rd Series Epistle), Bethany-Princeton MN

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION SHOULD ENCOURAGE YOU!

Prayer: Dear Lord, as You teach us that we are Your elect, that is, that You chose us by grace in eternity to belong to You, we pray that this knowledge would not make us sluggish in our Christian walk but encourage us every day to be zealous to do good works. You have begun the good work in us, You alone are able to keep us from stumbling; we pray You to complete this work in us. Amen.

The Text, 2 Peter 1:1-11. ¹Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: ²Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, ³as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, ⁴by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, ⁶to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, ⁷to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. ⁸For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. ¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen!

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

Here at the beginning of his second epistle the apostle Peter is speaking of the doctrine of election as he writes: **“Him who called us by glory and virtue,”** and then refers to **“your calling and election.”** The doctrine of election is an important part of our synod’s history. The other day was the 94th anniversary of the day that 13 pastors and nine congregations, having said “no” to joining a merger

of Norwegian Lutheran synods, met at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in Iowa to go forward as the "Little" Norwegian Synod and eventually the ELS. But did you know the reason for this? It was a difference in the doctrine of election.

The doctrine of election is the Bible's teaching, stated throughout the New Testament, that God called or chose you in eternity to be His own, and this election is by grace and in Christ. This is what the apostle Peter is talking about when he speaks of "**your calling and election**" -- this teaching that God personally chose and called you to be His own.

An important part of this doctrine, election by grace, is that what God did for you in eternity, when He chose you to be His own, He carries out during your life. He brings you to faith: first in baptism, which is the being "**cleansed**" that Peter mentions here; but also He gives you this faith constantly, by your coming to His Word and to the Lord's Supper to be kept in the one true faith. This emphasizes how God not only chose you to be His own, but in the means of grace He "*calls you by the Gospel,*" like the invitation in the parable from today's gospel lesson. However, this faith is not something you obtain by your own powers, but as Peter says, "**His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us.**" Your faith is given to you by the power of His Word. That too is grace, it's all gift.

However, there are Christians (who fall under the category of Calvinist) who follow various false teachings about election, including one called "*perseverance of the saints,*" or "*eternal security,*" but in an easier way to remember it it's just "once saved, always saved." They believe that a Christian can't fall from faith.

We don't believe this ... or do we? It is important to be certain of your salvation and be sure that you are one of the elect for the right reasons, namely that you believe God's Word and trust in His promises of grace. But there is such a thing as being "*sinfully secure,*" which means that because God forgives every-

thing, you live like you can do anything; it's abusing God's gift of forgiveness by doing whatever you want, thinking all is forgiven and you can't lose your salvation no matter what the sins are. Which brings us to these words of 2 Peter 1.

Why does Peter write about **"your calling and election?"** Because this – which is part of salvation by grace alone – gets blamed sometimes for Christians living like pigs, living as if there is no law that they need to obey. Peter writes this to say that the doctrine of election is not to be blamed for a lazy Christianity or people being indifferent to living according to God's Word. Just the opposite: the doctrine of election should encourage you to follow Christ in word *and* deed.

Peter writes: **"Be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure."** He connects this to his encouragement in the previous verses to **"add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."** This is a list of "fruits of faith" – good works that result from faith as naturally as healthy fruit grows on a healthy tree.

Let's look at just one of these: self-control, the lack of which is behind virtually every sin. Think of the lack of self-control in failing to curb your anger or your tongue, sinful sexual desires, failing to curb greed and envy, jealousy and rage, abuse of alcohol and use of recreational drugs, and even failing to accept adversity and cease despairing. An utter lack of self-control defines much of what is wrong with our world, especially when people abuse freedom as a license to sin and do even more evil. Lacking these things of course defines the world we live in, but what about when *Christians* lack them? The worst thing is that people imagine they can be good Christians while continuing in these sins. So you have Christians who excuse involvement with internet pornography, or who have just as foul of a mouth as ever, or they say *"no sin is worse than another,"* to silence the accusation. This has been called "cheap grace" – forgiveness

without repentance. It's professing faith in Jesus but not letting Him influence how you live. This is just a subtle way of doing what the men in the parable are pictured doing -- rejecting His gracious invitation, rejecting the Gospel.

It is not only those who are guilty of "big" sins who do this. But aren't we all guilty of making light of our sins? If you're used to doing something or thinking things that the Lord would not approve of -- there are a thousand examples in your life -- and aren't afraid of His judgment, or don't think your faith and salvation are in danger, you need to hear that unrepented or willful sin can't co-exist with faith. The Lutheran Confessions say: "*The faith of which we speak exists in repentance. It is conceived in the terrors of conscience, feels God's wrath against our sins and seeks to be freed from sin. This faith cannot exist in people who live by the flesh, who are delighted by their own lusts and obey them*" (Ap IV:142-143).

So is this a "Law message" that we are hearing today? When Peter says "**be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure,**" is he saying your good works are needed to preserve you in the faith? Is he saying that God's "**calling and election**" somehow is up to you, to make it "work?" Is he saying that your election can only be "sure" and certain through your own doing? Is the doing of the Law more important than the Gospel that you just receive by faith?

No, not at all. Martin Luther commented about this verse: "*The election and eternal foreknowledge of God are firm enough in themselves and man does not need to make them more so. The call is also strong and firm. For he who hears the Gospel, believes in it, and is baptized, is called and will be saved.*" However, Luther goes on to say, "*the fruits are not to be lacking, that faith may thereby become stronger, and ever do more and more good works ... The more faith is used and worked the stronger it becomes; and it suffers injury if it is not exercised. This now is Peter's meaning, that we should not let faith rest and lie still, since it becomes stronger by trial and exercise.*"

To our sinful nature, this just sounds like so much work and such a burden, and that's why we tend to become lazy Christians and not work at such things as self-control, perseverance, and brotherly kindness. But that also is why St. Peter connects this exhortation to the doctrine of election, and in fact to *your* being personally chosen and elected by God to be His own. Your faith does not stand alone as your work, as some burden that is up to you, nor does the exercising of your faith in good works count as your own work. Doesn't the Bible say of good works: "***God prepared them beforehand that we should walk in them***" (Eph 2:10)? You see, this goes back to your election in Christ before time began, that God chose you by grace alone, and He Himself gives you faith and leads you to walk in these good works that He prepared for you before you were born.

So this is a Gospel message, centered in Jesus Christ your God and Savior. All these promises only come true in Him. When you believe in Him, you have come to Him. Whenever you come to Him, even if you're weak and poor in understanding, even if you're full of excuses, He'll refuse to let you stay that way. He will lead you where He wants to go – where He wants *you* to go *with* Him.

You come to Him simply to receive forgiveness – that gift we so easily abuse -- but He gives you more than forgiveness, if that is possible. That's why His invitation is so great. He is not just keeping you from doing what you want or from instant gratification, which is how your sinful nature thinks. But when you come to Him, rather when He comes to you and leads you to repent and believe, He is leading you to pleasures that never end and are pure, in harmony with Him. He reforms your desire, He reforms your will, to be like His will so that you don't just take your forgiveness and go back to your sin, but you want what He wants. He is leading you to where this all began, in eternity, when He first called you. He is leading you to be in harmony with Him, to be in harmony with heaven, something bigger and more beautiful than anything this world can

ever offer you. As He called you in eternity He calls you to walk in love. These works do follow you into life eternal. Amen!