

Article 5 – God’s Purpose of Grace Back to the Basics

Intro – When you think of the word “purpose,” what comes to mind? Purpose is defined as “the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists” and as a verb it means to “have as one’s intention or objective.”

Purpose also carries the idea of **intentionality**. We say things like, “That guy sure is walking with a purpose,” or “that lady is definitely working with a purpose.” What we mean is that someone is acting with intentionality and passionate about the results of their work.

In terms of salvation, there is a special purpose in God’s grace. Of course, we know that all things have been created for God’s glory, but in this case we’re saying that God’s grace has been distributed to each child of God because of His predetermined purpose of salvation. Truly, “*salvation belongs to the Lord*” (Psalm 3:8).

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall

persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners.

- Throughout the last 500 years of Christian history, election has been one of the most hotly contested doctrines of the Christian faith. To this day it divides Christians and denominations.
- The reformers (Luther, Calvin, etc.) often held that because God is sovereign, sinners can only be saved by an act of God apart from any willful act on the part of the unbeliever. God alone is responsible for salvation – no one chooses God. This position is usually called “Calvinism.”
- Those who emphasize the free will of man have often pointed to passages that make it very clear that God does not desire the eternal damnation of any person, and thus if a person goes to hell it’s because God permitted him/her to exercise their free will. They have been called “Armenians.”
- Regardless of someone’s theological persuasion, we can all agree that “election is the gracious purpose of God.” The grace of God is bestowed on all those that He has predestined for salvation.
- Rom. 8:29 – “*whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.*” Only the elect receive God’s grace.

- It's through the means of election that our God "regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners." In other words, no one would be born again were it not for the purpose of God's grace.

It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end.

- If the first words of this article underscore the sovereignty of God, these words emphasize the free will of man. God's sovereign grace "is consistent with the free agency of man." In other words, God's sovereignty does not override man's freedom to receive or reject Christ.
- How does it work? The article says that God's gracious election "comprehends all the means in connection with the end." In other words, the "end" of God's grace is salvation, and God's sovereignty encompasses everything that is involved in a person's salvation – including the exercise of each person's free will.
- A.W. Tozer once tried to illustrate the balance between God's sovereignty and man's free will. He compared it to an oceanliner departing New York or London. Every passenger on the ship is going to end up in London and there is nothing they can do to take the ship off course. And yet, each passenger has the freedom to move about the ship as they please throughout the journey.
- Think of the ship's predetermined course as God's sovereignty, and each person's movement on the ship as man's free will. In no way does the ship's course override anyone's free will, and in no way do the passengers take the vessel off its course.

- In the example, the sovereign will of God is fixed and the freedom of the human is preserved. That's much like salvation works – God's elective purposes have been fixed from eternity past, but in no way does election remove the free will of man.
- So how do we reconcile the sovereignty of God with the free will of man biblically? By looking to the words of Paul – "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*" (Rom. 8:29).
- Let me say it like this – **predestination/election is a biblical doctrine, but it is only corrected understood against the backdrop of God's foreknowledge.** God's sovereignty insures that salvation belongs to the Lord, and God's foreknowledge means that each person's salvation or damnation hinges on their own reception or rejection of Jesus.

It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

- The doctrine of election displays God's "sovereign goodness and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable." Lest anyone wants to question God's sovereign will, this is a great answer.
- First, God's election is "infinitely wise." Why? Because God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). As the omniscient God of heaven, He is the source of all wisdom.
- And of course, His purpose of grace is completely holy – perfect and untarnished in all its ways.

- And even though God predestined all His elect from eternity past – much like He predetermined His own Son’s sacrifice (Rev. 13:8) – His decision has never changed. We know that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8) and that with Him there is no variation (James 1:17).
- Because election is bound up in God’s merciful goodness and infinite wisdom, there is no place for boasting among those who are saved. The only reason that anyone is saved is because of Christ’s sacrifice and the conviction of the Spirit.
- Instead, every believer should live a life of deep humility, recognizing that we truly deserve hell and it’s only by God’s grace that we’ve been kept from hell. “*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6).
- Jesus described the attitude of a sinner who has received God’s grace – “*So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’*” (Luke 17:10). Humbly sacrificing our lives for God’s glory is our “*reasonable service*” (Rom. 12:1).

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.

- God’s elective decree of salvation ensures that “all true believers endure to the end.” This is a promise that belongs to all those that have truly been born again – “accepted in Christ and sanctified by His Spirit.”

- What we’re saying is that no true Christian has ever fallen from grace – not a single one. Why? Because a true believer “will never fall away...but shall endure to the end.” Historically this has been called this the eternal security of the believer.
- Some people object eternal security and point to passages of Scripture that appear to contradict the doctrine:
 - Heb. 6:4-6 – “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*”
 - Heb. 10:26-27 – “*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*”
- Furthermore, biblical examples are even used at times to undermine the idea of eternal security. Skeptics often point to the example of Judas as a man who “fell from grace.”
- No matter what you do with those passages, you can not interpret them as a fall from grace. Why? Because the overarching message of Scripture is that every blood-bought child of God is eternally secure in the hands of Jesus.

- John made perseverance of the saints very clear – *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us”* (1 John 2:19).
- The parable of the sower also makes it very clear that many folks appear to be born again for a little while, only to wilt away later. Why? Because they were never “rooted in Christ” – they were never truly born again and thus they fell away.
- Paul said it like this – *“For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. 12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; **He cannot deny Himself**”* (2 Tim. 2:11-13).

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

- While it’s true that no true child of God has ever fallen from grace, it’s also true that they “may fall into sin through neglect and temptation.” Ever born again believer is still a fallen sinner.
- James explained – *“Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed”* (James 1:13-14).
- Even the greatest of men and women – heroes of the faith – had shameful moments where they fell into sin – Noah was drunk before his children, Abraham lied about his wife, Moses failed to believe God’s Word, Joshua forged a foolish treaty, David murdered Uriah, Peter denied the Lord, etc.
- Through our own neglect of God and His Word, we can all fall into sin, and in doing so we grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30). That is, we anger the Spirit through our willfully disobedience of His leading.
- Through our sin we also impair our own “graces and comforts.” In other words, our sin not only grieves the Spirit, but it also has detrimental effects for us. God gave us His Word not only for His glory, but for our good as well!
- And of course, through sin we bring reproach on the cause of Christ and “temporal judgments” on ourselves. Those reproaches and judgments are often very damaging, but as Christ-followers we rejoice that they are only temporary.
- Despite the fact that we often fall into sin and do damage to ourselves and the cause of Christ, by God’s grace we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”
- Speaking of His sheep, Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:28-30). We are eternally secure in the hands of Jesus and our Heavenly Father!

