

First Peter No. 2 “Peter the Calvinist”

1 Peter 1:1-2

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The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Rayburn

Tonight we read the same two verses that we read last time, the opening address of the letter. In the epistles or letters of the New Testament the opening address is much more significant than our “Dear so and so...” or, as it is now becoming in the email age, “Hi, so and so...” or just “So and so...”

There are two striking and important matters raised in the opening address of this letter. The first is Peter's characterization of these Christians as “exiles.” I am going to pass by that because it is raised again more comprehensively in 2:11. We will treat the description of Christians as “sojourners and exiles” when we get there.

The other is the strongly predestinarian strain in Peter's address. He writes his letter to “God's elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...” There is more of this to come in the letter, but it bears our notice and our thoughtful attention how artlessly Peter identifies the Christians to whom he writes as “the chosen of God.”

Now what Peter says is not difficult to understand, however unwilling some may be to accept what he says. He says that these folk were chosen by God for salvation (that is certainly what *elect* means) – for obedience to Christ and sprinkling by his blood – and that God chose them according to his “foreknowledge.” “Foreknowledge” in the Bible is virtually a synonym for predestination or election. In the standard dictionary or lexicon of NT Greek, the one used by all scholars and pastors, the word that appears here and is translated as “foreknowledge” is actually defined as “predestination.” A translation of its use here in 1 Peter 1:2 is given in the article on the word in that dictionary and that translation reads, “*according to the predestination of God the father.*” But the term is actually richer. The word literally means, obviously enough, “knowledge beforehand.” But, in reference to God, it is that knowledge that belongs to God's omniscience which is in the Bible a function of his rule over the course of events as they unfold in the world. That is God's knowledge of the future is an aspect of his determination of the future. For example, in Acts 2:23, we are told that Jesus was handed over to those who executed him “by God's set purpose *and foreknowledge...*” Divine foreknowledge is not merely knowledge ahead of time of what is to transpire, it is knowledge of God's own plan and purpose. As the Lord said through Isaiah,

“I am God and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” [Isa. 46:10].

God knows all things, all events, all history ahead of time, because he has determined the course of events, because history unfolds according to the counsel of his will. The Bible says this hundreds of times and in language so clear as would seem impossible to misunderstand. We see but one point along the road and understand but dimly what we see even there. He sees the entire road, from its beginning to its end, and every detail at every point with all of the connections linking one to another. What are past, present, and future to us, are all present to him – he is the God who “inhabits eternity.” *His knowledge of the future and his rule of the future are two sides of the same*

coin.

But, the term “foreknowledge” may also carry in itself the idea of “love.” As you know, often in the Bible, the word for knowledge is used to convey intimacy and affection, a deeper relationship. For example, it is often used as a euphemism for the sexual relationship. Adam *knew* his wife Eve, and she conceived their son Cain. And when the Lord said to Israel in Amos 3:2, “you only *have I known* of all the families of the earth,” he was saying much more than that he “knew *about*” Israel. He knows *about* all mankind and every nation, but He *knew* Israel alone. That is, he loved Israel, he chose Israel, and he brought her into covenant with himself. In that sense he knew her as he knew no other nation on earth.

And this sense is carried over into the idea of foreknowledge. Long beforehand, even before the foundation of the world, God had chosen his people, these very folk who were Christians in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, etc. He had chosen them for salvation by Christ and his Spirit, had set his love upon them, and had determined that he would bring them into fellowship with himself in due time. If words and sentences mean what they say, that is what these words and this sentence means. As Calvin summarizes it: “God knew before the world was created those whom he had elected for salvation.” He also knew *how* he would save them. We will read in v. 20 of chapter 1 that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who would redeem his people, was also *foreknown* before the foundation of the world.

Now, most of you are well aware that, plain as these statements may seem to be -- and there are many more such statements in the Bible, often more blunt than this one in their assertion of God’s having chosen beforehand those who are saved – there has existed through the ages a great controversy over these statements and this doctrine of divine election. From the beginning it was seen – just as Paul in Romans 9 predicted it would be – that if we are to believe that God chose beforehand whom he would save, then, it follows that *he chose not to save others*. Does this not impeach either God’s justice or his goodness? What is more, if God has chosen beforehand who is to be saved, does that not make human decision and human freedom inconsequential? If the decision was God’s, and God’s will is always done, what difference does man’s choice really make, for who can resist God’s will?

These have seemed to be weighty objections to a great many Christians through the ages and there has hardly been a time in the history of the church in which Christians have not been divided and separated from one another over this doctrine of divine election, with its implication of particular grace, that is, grace that distinguishes between people, saving some and not others. In the time of Augustine, who changed his mind on this subject and became in the world of his day its greatest champion of sovereign grace and election, of God’s choosing those who would be saved, there was a strong reaction against his teaching and for centuries afterward the church taught a doctrine of salvation in which the final and decisive factor in the salvation of any man or woman was the free, unaided, and unfettered decision of the human will. God’s part was to make salvation possible; man’s part was to choose to make that salvation an actuality in his or her own case by believing in Christ and by doing certain pious works. At the last heaven was up to the man or woman.

The Reformation of the 16th century marked a decisive return to Augustine’s doctrine of sovereign and particular grace, divine love pitched on particular individuals from eternity past and bringing them to life in Christ. On this score there was no difference and no division between Luther,

Tyndale, Latimer, Ridley, Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox. They were all Augustinians to the man and resolutely and enthusiastically champions of what we now refer to as *sovereign grace*, the doctrine of which divine election is the foundation. Indeed, Calvin's defense of sovereign grace was so powerful and influential, ever since people who confess that doctrine have been called *Calvinists*! But there were those, even among the Reformers, who blanched. Luther's young associate, Philip Melancthon, at first embraced his mentor's strongly predestinarian teaching, but later rejected it and made the human will, unfettered and independent, the final cause of anyone's salvation.

And soon thereafter another strong reaction set in even in the Reformed churches as men rejected this sovereign grace and discriminating love of God and chose instead a doctrine of salvation that was, again, a mixture of God's work and man's choice, with man's choice the decisive factor that separated the saved from the lost. These latter came to be called the Arminians, the followers of a Dutch theologian, Jacob Hermanson (Arminius was the Latinized form of his name), who lived into the early years of the 17th century and who, with his disciples, rejected Augustine and the Reformers' understanding of election and foreknowledge.

The 17th century, the century of the Puritans, saw running controversies on the subject of the source and ultimate cause of salvation, with the Puritans championing sovereign grace and the election of God and their opponents laying stress instead on man's free will and decision as ultimately decisive. In the 18th century the Great Awakening, the great revival in the English speaking world was broken in two over these same doctrines and the historic parties surfaced again, the Wesleys following Arminius and Whitefield, John Newton, Augustus Toplady, and Jonathan Edwards following the Reformers and Augustine in their interpretation of the biblical texts.

And so it has come down to the present day. If you want to start a fight, just raise the issue of election and foreknowledge in a room full of Christians. Think of two of the principle English-speaking defenders of the Christian faith in the second half of the 20th century. Francis Schaeffer believed in divine election and sovereign grace, C.S. Lewis did not. Think of the great evangelists of the 19th and 20th centuries. Charles Spurgeon, the greatest preacher of the 19th century and Martin Lloyd Jones of the 20th century preached sovereign grace with power and effect in their long ministries, but Billy Graham, immensely influential as he was, is an Arminian and thinks the ultimate cause of anyone's salvation lies in the decision of that individual and not in God's choice of him or her for salvation before the foundation of time. You might think that by now we would have got beyond this argument. After all, we read the same Bible, are loyal to the same Bible, and have been at this for nearly 2,000 years. But alas, no! The controversy will not go away. Lloyd Jones tells of a day, a short while after he had come to see the truth of divine election and sovereign grace – he had been of an Arminian mind when first a Christian – that in the matter of salvation all things are under the rule of God's eternal throne, he had a discussion about these things with his brother Vincent when they were both on holiday at the home of their uncle. The argument began after lunch, was still going when tea was served, and finally concluded late in the evening, but only after Vincent had lost his voice! These issues strike deeply into the heart and mind and either paradigm has massive implications. I fully suspect there will be Arminians and Calvinists together greeting the Lord Jesus Christ upon his return!

What is more, people feel so deeply, so viscerally, about this issue that you will find their perspective completely warped by their unwillingness to give any ground to the other side. Many

scholars of Augustine, for example, are pained by the strength of his advocacy of divine election and predestination, but you will run into ardent Arminians who cannot bring themselves to admit that the great Augustine should have held such views and argue with great passion that he has been misunderstood all these centuries and never meant to teach that salvation is entirely God's gift and God's choice, a gift given to those God loved before the world was made and given to no others. It is the sign of an invincible prejudice that makes Augustine an Arminian!

There are many Arminians today who think very highly of Charles Spurgeon and would hotly resent the suggestion that he believed what Augustine and Luther and Calvin believed about divine grace and election being the ultimate explanation for any individual's salvation. They think Spurgeon is on their side because they know Spurgeon only from editions of his printed sermons published after his death in which Spurgeon's ardent advocacy of sovereign grace was carefully edited out! Certain of his editors couldn't stand the thought of Spurgeon's sermons spreading the doctrine of sovereign grace and so they changed the sermons accordingly. Spurgeon had no sympathy with Arminianism at all, but you wouldn't know that from many of his sermons that were published in altered form after his death.

But here is Spurgeon in his own voice:

"I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel...unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah..." [*Autobiography*, I, 172]

On the other hand, there have been many Calvinists who have twisted Scripture texts to take the human will out of consideration or have misrepresented Arminians to make their beliefs seem less than Christian. This controversy has caused sin all around! I know I've sinned in arguing for my particular position, and I know others have as well. I'm a Calvinist but I know many Arminians who believe in *salvation sola gratia* (*grace alone*). I may struggle to understand *how* they can believe that salvation is all of grace, but I have no doubt that they believe that it is. Controversial as this doctrine has been and remains, let me remind you of some important considerations.

1. The greatest theological minds of the church have been champions of election and sovereign grace and often became so after first holding other views. Augustine's study of Romans led him to champion divine election. Calvin had little about election in the first edition of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but after his further study of Romans the doctrine of sovereign grace became a major theme of the *Institutes*. Luther, Knox, Owen, Rutherford, Edwards, Hodge, Warfield and so many others all agreed that divine election was the clear, unmistakable teaching of Holy Scripture and the only doctrine that could be held consistently with the other teachings of the Bible. They were driven to this doctrine by what they considered to be the plain speaking of the Bible, its clear teaching, and the facts of Christian experience. John Wesley is, I think, really the only man who could fairly be said to be a *doctor* of the Christian church – that is, a teacher whose authority is recognized by most all Christians – who also denied sovereign grace. On the other hand, Wesley was a great man, greatly used by God in the salvation of multitudes.

I offer this as my own observation, but as some demonstration of the fact that the sovereign grace men were more reliable interpreters of the Bible. The observation is this: You will run into many Christian people who used to be Arminians but who are now strong believers in the sovereignty of divine grace. But you will only rarely run into Christians who used to believe in election but now do not. And the reason for that is this: the doctrines of election and God's sovereign and distinguishing grace lie on the face of the pages of Holy Scripture. Read the Bible without a previous commitment to one side or the other and chances are you will soon not be able to evade the force of this teaching. It comes too often, in too many ways, too plainly, and too emphatically to miss. Unbelieving biblical scholarship typically does not deny the strongly predestinarian strain in the Bible's teaching. They find it there. They don't believe it, because they don't believe the Bible; but they can certainly see that this is what the Bible teaches.

2. Two thousand years of theological history have proved that the alternative to the doctrine of divine election and sovereign grace is not another form of salvation by grace, but some form of synergism, in which God and man cooperate in salvation and in which the final decision is left in man's hand, not God's. All alternatives finally reduce to the *sovereignty of man* in salvation.

For example, in regard to foreknowledge, the Arminian maintains that what God foreknows is whether or not a man or woman, with his or her unaided will, will choose to believe in Christ. God looks down the corridors of time to see in advance who will believe and who will not. Those whom he sees will choose to believe in Christ he chooses. What is foreknown, in other words, is a person's eventual faith in Christ. He or she is elect, chosen by God because God knew that he or she would choose Christ. Those who elected Christ the Father then elects. In that scheme – something the Bible certainly never *teaches* – God loves us because we first loved him; the real choice is not made by God but by man. God's election is only a ratification of man's choice of God. Everybody has to have a doctrine of election because the word is frequently in the Bible. They will never put it this way, but at the decisive point, at the point where the great difference for time and eternity is made, man saves himself by availing himself of the opportunity when others do not. The difference between the saved and the lost does not lie in God but in man. Christ made salvation possible, in this scheme, in that sense he is the savior, but when he finished his work he had saved no one, and, what is more, he did the same thing for the man who is now in hell as the one who is now in heaven.

But, the Bible doesn't say that God foreknew faith or anything else. It says that God foreknew *his people* and whom he foreknew, he predestined to be saved. He didn't know something *about* them ahead of time, he knew *them* ahead of time!

Paul rests the hope of believers on the sovereign, conquering, immutable, and invincible love of God for his chosen people. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Peter does exactly the same thing without as lengthy an argument, but with exactly the same terminology. But in these other views, if the truth be told, the sentence should read, "If we are for God, who can be against us?" But any honest Christian, Calvinist or Arminian, knows that cannot be right. It was a man who believed ardently in divine election who wrote "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see." In the Arminian scheme, consistently held – and thankfully, few hold it consistently – grace is not really amazing and the man was not found. He found God, God didn't find him. God created the possibility of salvation and reported the same to the world, but then left it to each man to decide whether he

would avail himself of the opportunity or not. “Here it is, if you want it. It’s up to you.” No one who thinks *that* about salvation would write “Amazing Grace.”

Nor would he write:

Long my imprison'd spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night,
Thine eye diffus'd a quick'ning ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off; my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and follow'd Thee.

Now, that, strange to say, was written by an Arminian. But Charles Wesley wrote it very soon after his conversion, perhaps before he was educated in the dispute about grace and election. His hymn is a perfect account of what all Christians, whatever their theology, know to be true about the dawning of spiritual life in their hearts – it was God's work in them and God's gift to them and in no respect was it their own doing. But what a Christian heart says about its own salvation and what it says when standing on its feet in debate – I know from my own painful experience – can be two different things.

3. The doctrines of election, foreknowledge, and sovereign grace are doctrines for the encouragement and contemplation of Christians. In the Bible they are always taught for our blessing and benefit. They are, as the Bible itself teaches, high mysteries. A great deal of harm and foolishness has resulted from men exercising their tongues and their pens on these subjects before having been thoroughly established in the foundations of human sin and justification by faith in Christ. Election is no doctrine for the novice. As John Bradford, the English bishop and martyr of the 16th century, once tartly put it wrote, “Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance, before he goes to the university of election and predestination.” There are difficulties here, difficulties that *no one* can resolve, Paul said there would be, and didn't himself remove the difficulties in Romans 9. Two thousand years of argument – argument with godly men and women *on both sides* – ought to prove that to us if nothing else does. Anyone who thinks that there aren't problems here, vexing problems hasn't thought hard enough.

4. Fourth, the doctrine of election, of sovereign grace, of God's choosing man rather than man choosing God, has been so strongly objected to, as we said, because it has seemed to many who love God and want to honor him that it reflects poorly on God and renders null and void human freedom – to which the Bible is always appealing – and human dignity. Those are, of course, important truths to defend: the justice, goodness, and wisdom of God and the freedom and responsibility of human beings. Now, as an aside, let me say that these concerns are in fact an argument *for* sovereign grace rather than against it. Paul said in Romans 9 that those were the very objections he anticipated people making to *his* teaching about saving grace. “You're going to say it makes God unjust and you're going to say it nullifies the human will.” That is to say, only a doctrine susceptible to objections *on those grounds* is the biblical doctrine, the doctrine that Paul taught. But no one *has ever* objected to Arminianism on those two grounds: that it makes God unfair or that it nullifies the human will. It is in fact a system designed precisely to avoid those objections. If, as they say, God made salvation a possibility for everyone and then leaves it up to man to choose to be saved or not, no one can think or would say that God is unfair – he treats everyone the same – and no one would think that human freedom or accountability is nullified. Human freedom, in this scheme, is the supremely decisive factor. But that all leads inexorably to the conclusion that Paul was not an Arminian, for he knew people would object to his teaching

with the very objections that Arminianism is designed to avoid!

But, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that divine election and sovereign grace do not, in any way, cast reproach on the character of God. He is pure, holy, just, and gracious and he is that in all his ways. Nor, does this doctrine of divine foreknowledge and election nullify human freedom. Man is free to do as he pleases, his choices matter, he is responsible for them. All of this the Bible affirms and we must believe. Many things can be said in the explanation of these things. Paul offers some responses and explanations in Romans 9. He reminds us that we are speaking of God loving his enemies, and being merciful to some. It is not a case of justice. No one is getting less than he deserves, even if some are getting much more than they deserve. And he reminds us that we creatures, sinful, small, foolish, finite as we are, are in a very poor position to pass judgment on the character and the actions of Almighty God, the holy and just God, who never does nor can do anything but what is perfectly right! “Shall the clay say to the potter, ‘Why did you make me thus?’” However mysterious in some ways this divine election is and must remain, to believe it – clearly taught in the Word of God as it is – impeaches neither the character of God nor the dignity of man.

We may not know precisely how to explain all of this – of course we do not. These are the deepest things we know and are mysteries far beyond our powers of comprehension. But we believe all of this to be true because the Bible teaches it to be. The Bible never seeks to reconcile sovereign grace and human responsibility, but it teaches both emphatically.

But I wish to be and want you to be as much champions of God's goodness and justice and of man's true responsibility as any Arminian. I want you to care as deeply as the best of those Christians do for the honor of God and the true freedom and dignity of man. I want you to have an appreciation for and to have a respect for the freedom and responsibility that God has given to man second to no Arminian. But, I also want to be and want you to be champions of the sovereignty of divine grace and of salvation by the grace of God. I want you to think of Christ, as we are taught to think of him in Holy Scripture, as coming into the world precisely to redeem the people the Father had given to him, to love those the Father had given to them and to love them to the end.

I want you to believe in your bones and to confess with all your heart that your life is in God's hands; that the Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth stooped to love *you!* that you love him because he first loved *you* – not all of you together, *each of you individually* – that you owe him everything, absolutely everything for the hopes you have of everlasting life, *and* that you are secure in those hopes precisely because they rest not on the strength of *your* faith, but on the immutable, eternal, and unconquerable love *of God* for *you*. Have you stopped to consider that fact? The Son of God came into the world *for you*; not for mankind, but *for you*. He went to the cross *for you*. That is the dramatic, absolutely wonderful implication of this teaching. God doesn't love you simply as part of a mass of people; he doesn't love because you belong to the class of people he has chosen to save. *He chose you, he knew you* before the foundation of the world. *He loves you! He saved you! He is coming again to get you!* If that fact weren't exceedingly important for you to know the Bible wouldn't repeat it as often as it does, even knowing how controversial the fact would prove to be.

These doctrines of election and foreknowledge and predestination exalt God and humble man before God. They make all men low before God but high and strong before kings. They establish

everything in our lives on the eternal rock of one absolute sovereign, to whose will there is no limit, but they level all other sovereigns in the dust. They render Christ great, as the King of Love, and the believing sinner infinitely secure in him. These doctrines establish the highest conceivable motives to obedience -- the infinite God loved you, before the world was made, you, your name was engraved on his heart --. They extinguish fear, make victory certain, inspire with enthusiasm, and make the heart and arm strong. [A. A. Hodge, *Lectures in Theology*, 138]

If you stop and ponder that if you are a believer in Christ you were chosen by God before the world was made, loved by him, and that in all the work of grace in this world, and in all the work of Jesus Christ who came into the world, *you* were in his view; I say, ponder that and a whole world, bright, brilliant, beautiful, will open before your eyes! This is why so many people have found the embrace of the sovereignty of divine grace a paradigm shift that opened to them all manner of truth they had never seen before. Here is Charles Spurgeon telling how it was for him.

Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born, as all of us are by nature, an Arminian, I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul -- when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron, and can recollect how I felt that I had grown on a sudden from a babe into a man -- that I had made progress in Scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "*How did you come to be a Christian?*" I sought the Lord. "*But how did you come to seek the Lord?*" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment -- I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to *make me* seek Him. ... Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me.

I read over the past few weeks a superb history of the Korean War. That is a war most Americans know little about and I was among them, though my father had served in that war. I learned all manner of things, much, alas, not to the credit of my country, its civilian and military leadership, and its young men in the early 1950s. I didn't know -- did you? -- that our young men died in great numbers in North Korean prison camps. They were mistreated, to be sure, but our men died when other POWs did not. Few South Koreans died. The Turks had sent a brigade to Korea as part of the United Nations Forces and they fought bravely. But some of their men were also captured. Not a single Turk died in captivity, though they suffered the same cold, ate the same miserable diet, were in want of the same medicines, and experienced the same brutal neglect that the American POWs did. And many American men *did* survive. What made the difference? It didn't seem to be sickness because many who survived had the same illnesses that carried away others. What is more, that wouldn't account for the fact that 50% of the Americans died and not a single Turk.

The explanation provided in the book runs along these lines. The Turk knew who he was. He was a citizen of a backward and brutal civilization that in most respects we find, and rightly, disgusting.

But the Turk knew who he was. He was proud of his nationality, of his religion – he was a fanatically devout Muslim – and proud of his fighting reputation. He knew why he was in Korea. He was there to fight and so he fought. He was used to hardship and he accepted it. He was a man under authority and he accepted that also. The Turks did what their officers told them to do, even in the camps, even after the Chinese commanders had eliminated rank among the POWs in the camps the Turks still did what their officers told them to do. If a Turk was found being too friendly with their Chinese captors he was beaten severely by his own countrymen. They would not tolerate disloyalty.

Americans, at this historical moment, were virtually the mirror opposite of the Turks. They didn't know who they were, they didn't know why they were fighting, they didn't want to be in Korea, and they were soft. Even the Army had coddled them, under new orders from the political class. These soldiers had been subjected to almost no hardship, even in training, disobedience to orders was rarely punished, and so when the fighting started the U.S. Army collapsed and retreated in disorder, leaving its equipment behind. The retreating U.S. Army was the second largest supplier of the North Korean Army's equipment in the first months of the Korean War. Soldiers ordered to stand and fight simply refused to do so, turned their backs and ran. These were the men who were captured and held in Chinese-run prison camps and held for three long years. There too they refused to obey their officers, refused to help with the care of the sick even when their doctors pleaded with them to do so. "Who are you to tell me what to do?" When the Chinese guards told the American GIs that rank was abolished in the camp and all were equal, many of the GIs welcomed the news. Now no one had to obey anyone else. One NCO who survived, a strong Christian by the name of Schlichter, reported that one American GI whom he was encouraging to eat, however much he disliked the food, replied angrily, "My parents never made me do things like this." Strangely, it was the young who died first. [T.R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War*, 316-321; 374-379]

Knowing who you are, knowing that your life matters, knowing that you have sacred obligations, knowing that you have a life to offer to God can be the difference between life and death on the battlefield or the POW cage. It also can be the difference between what sort of death you die. But it also makes all the difference in human life in general. Do you know who you are? Do you know that your life really matters and matters supremely because it matters to God? Do you know what your sacred obligations are? Do you know that someone very great cares about what you do with your life day by day? Do you know that the American Chaplains in the prison camps, died to the last man? They were the only class or group to be completely wiped out. Why? Because they were sharing their little bit of food with the starving; because they were working hard when most were lethargic and unresponsive. And because when they got sick they were refused food or medicine by the Chinese. The Chinese communists feared and hated the Christian faith and showed it no mercy. It was a power they knew they could not control. But unlike so many of the POWs the chaplains died for something and for someone! *The chaplains knew who they were!*

So you see? That is what the doctrine of election does or is supposed to do for a Christian. You are someone God has loved for as long as there has been time, you are someone God has chosen by name! Your life matters *to him!* Matters immensely; beyond your power to calculate. It is your supreme privilege to love and serve that God who loved you before the world was made. You have something fabulously important to do with your life: give it back to the Almighty in loving obedience and service. People who know that, who believe that, who live with that conviction,

both survive the shocks of this world and make something of their lives while in it. The Christians to whom Peter wrote his first letter had fallen on some difficult times. They were being mistreated by others. What they needed to know was simply this: they were people whom God loved; whom God had loved from eternity past; whom God had chosen to make his own children now and forever. If you know *that* you know everything you need to know!