

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the upcoming election, the tone of the candidates has become increasingly combative. Someone said the word "politics" comes from two words, *poly*, meaning "many" and *ticks*, which means "blood sucking parasites." I grew up in Alabama during the George Wallace regime when the motto was "vote early and often." Actually, Alabama used to lead the nation in voter turnout—from cemeteries!

As the mood of this election heats up, America needs someone like Will Rogers to step into the picture and tell everybody to lighten up. He was a cowboy/humorist who entertained crowds in the early twentieth century. He amused people with rope tricks as he made wry comments about politics and other subjects. Some of his famous political quotes included: "I don't make jokes. I just watch the government and report the facts." "The problem with political jokes is that they end up getting elected." "The more you observe this politics thing, the more you realize that each party is worse than the other. The one that's out always looks the best!" "I'm not a member of any organized political party. I am a Democrat." My favorite Will Rogerism was, "The man with the best job in the country is the Vice President. All he has to do is get up every morning and say, 'How's the President?'"

We all recall the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the 2000 Presidential Election. November 7 was Election Day, and by the end of that day, the only thing certain was the uncertainty about whether Al Gore or George W. Bush would be the next President. The result of the election hinged upon which candidate had the most votes in Florida.

We learned new terms like "hanging chads" and "butterfly ballots." Some voters complained the butterfly ballots were too confusing. I saw a cartoon recently that carried the caption, "Florida is ready for 2004." It had a picture of a "Fisher Price voting device" that was a child's toy where different shapes were inserted into their matching holes.

It wasn't until December 12, 2000 that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled George W. Bush won the election in Florida by a slim margin of 536 votes. We all hope and pray we won't have a repeat of the confusion that surrounded the 2000 election, but lawyers on both sides have already filed preliminary lawsuits in the event there is a need for a recount.

The lesson today from II Peter is entitled "How to Be Absolutely Sure About This Election." The upcoming Presidential election is *not* the most important election in all of history. This passage addresses *another* election. And it is most important election of your life.

You can read about this election in II Peter 1:8-11. In the preceding verses we read about the importance of starting with a foundation of faith. But faith alone isn't enough. We must add to our faith these seven qualities: Goodness, Knowledge, Self-Control, Perseverance, Godliness, Kindness and Love. Peter continues: "For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. (Thus, the title "How to Be Absolutely Sure About This Election" For

if you these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The future of America is at stake in this Presidential election, but the future of the universe doesn't depend on who is sitting in the White House in Washington. It all depends on Who is sitting on the Great White throne in heaven. This election spoken of in the Bible is the act whereby God elects men and women to be His children. It is a Divine Election for salvation. And it is possible to be absolutely sure about this election. Let's consider three important principles of salvation:

1. YOUR SALVATION IS THE WORK OF GOD

When we refer to our personal salvation, we sometimes speak about it as if it's something we have done. Actually, salvation is the total work of God, and it's not anything I do. You hear phrases like, “I found the Lord.” Well, He found you before you ever found Him. Notice in verse 10 that there are two aspects of salvation: calling and election.

(1) God's call: Hear His voice and repent!

If God hadn't called you, there's no way you could have come to Him. Before you can become a Christian you must hear God's voice and be willing to accept His directions.

If your cell phone rang and you discovered it was God calling, do you know what He would say? He'd say, “I'm calling to instruct you to repent. I love you. I love you so much that I gave my only begotten Son. If you will believe in Him you won't perish. You'll have eternal life.” Chances are, God won't call you on the telephone, but He has called you through His Word and through His servants. This message today could be another attempt for God to get through to you.

Once, the Apostle Paul was speaking to a group of philosophers in Athens, Greece. He was surrounded by their pantheon of gods represented by statues and images. He said, “We should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:29-30)

In the Bible, repentance means to change your mind and change your direction. Imagine you're driving down a highway and you become hopelessly lost. Meanwhile there is passenger in the car who knows the way to your destination. They tell you to turn around and go back. Are you so stubborn you would refuse to follow their directions? In the same way, millions of people are headed toward hell at a breakneck speed and a loving God is calling them to repent. Have you heard his call? Have you obeyed His voice?

(2) God's choice: He elected you to be His child!

When I was a child, playing neighborhood baseball, I often played with older boys. When they were “choosing sides” I would stand there thinking, “Choose me! Choose me!” When one of the

older boys said, "I'll take David" it made me feel great!

When God started choosing people to be in His family, He did the same thing. This Bible doctrine is called Divine Election. If you have chosen to follow Jesus Christ, you must understand that long before you chose Him, He chose you. Some people ask, "Well what is my part in salvation?" The answer is simple. God saves sinners from their sin. My part was the sinning, and God's part was the saving!

Although the Bible teaches God elected some people to be saved, it never says God intended anyone to be lost. In chapter three of II Peter, he wrote, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) So, don't be concerned with whether God willed anyone else to salvation; your command is to make your *own* calling and election sure.

When God elected His family members, He did it a long time before we were even born. The Bible says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." (Ephesians 1:3-5) It was God's love that caused Him to elect men and women to be His children. He did it simply because it was His will and it gave Him pleasure.

I'm not the first to talk about the Bible doctrine of election before a political election. Almost 150 years ago, the great British Baptist Pastor, Charles Spurgeon, chose to speak on the doctrine of election just before important elections to Parliament. In commenting on Ephesians 1:3-5 Spurgeon said: "In the very beginning, when this great universe was in the mind of God, like unborn forests in a cup of acorns...long before the mountains were brought forth; and long before the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen men and women. Before there were men and women—when space itself did not exist; when there was nothing but God alone; even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and depth, His heart moved for His chosen ones. Their names were written on His heart, and they became dear to His soul."

Jesus taught the doctrine of Divine Election. On several occasions He referred to God's children as "the elect." For instance, when He spoke of His second coming He said, "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." (Matthew 24:31)

This is a deep truth that is hard to comprehend. Maybe this simple illustration will help you grasp it better. Our church has formed a 50th Anniversary Committee to help us plan and celebrate our 50th year of existence next May. We met for the first time a few weeks ago in my office. After prayer I said, "We need to elect a chairman of this committee." One of the members said, "I think Jim Powell should be the chairman." Jim was on the committee, but he wasn't at the meeting. He got elected chairman and he didn't even know it! (That's why you don't want to miss meetings; you may get elected to a job)

A few minutes later, Jim arrived for the meeting. I said, "Congratulations, Jim, you've been elected to be the Chairman of this committee!" Jim could have stormed out of the room saying,

"No way! Not me! I'm not going to do it!" But he didn't. One of the reasons we chose him is because we know his heart; he's a servant. Even with our human limitations we knew he would accept. God knows you better than you know yourself, and in His perfect foreknowledge, He elects those who He knows will humbly accept His choice.

It's HIS election. Salvation is the Act of God. But the point of this passage is for you to look at your life and make sure you have been elected. The second principle about salvation is:

2. YOU CAN KNOW FOR SURE THAT YOU'RE SAVED

It's possible to think you're saved when you're really not. Jesus spoke about people who would stand before Him on Judgement Day and say, "Lord, Lord, in your name, we did many wonderful things." But He will say, "Depart from me I never knew you."

Don't be deceived. Just because you walked down an aisle, signed a card, and got dunked in a big bathtub is no proof you're really a Christian. Having your name on a church roll is not proof of salvation. Attending church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you a Buick. The proof of salvation is a changed life.

Some people say, "Well you can't know FOR SURE if you're really saved or not." Yes you can. The Bible says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (I John 5:13) The Christian life is like being born again. You enter it through a spiritual birth. Sometimes people are born with what is called a birthmark. I have one high up on the back of my hip that I'm not going to show you, you'll just have to take my word that it's there. Not everyone has a birthmark, but if you have one it is part of the proof you were born. In the same way there are some birthmarks of a believer. These aren't things you need to do, or you ought to do. They are things you will do if you are a child of God. You'll just do what comes supernaturally!

(1) You will have a hunger to know God

The first mark of being a child of God is that you will have a definite sense God is real and that you have a personal relationship with Him. If you are a Christian you won't think of God as some impersonal force who resides in another galaxy far, far away. You'll have a sense of His nearness. In fact, it will be as if He is as close to you as your heart because He IS dwelling in your spirit. The Bible says, "You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:15-16) The Apostle Paul described it this way, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection..." (Philippians 3:10)

There was a formal word in Bible times for "Father." It was the word *pater*, from which we get our English word paternal. But the word *abba* was the simple cry uttered by a newborn baby as he looked up into the face of his father. It's a word of deep love and intimacy. It's like our word "papa" or "daddy." Is that how you speak to God? Or to you, is God "the man upstairs" or "the good Lord?" That's the first birthmark.

(2) You will have a hatred of sin

When you become a Christian, God doesn't fix you so you can't sin, but He does fix you so you can't sin and *enjoy* it. If you're truly saved, you won't be sinless, but you will certainly sin *less*. The Bible says, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning. This is how we know who the children of God are." (I John 3:9) This very doesn't say that you will *never* sin. It means if you are truly a child of God, you cannot willfully and habitually sin without any sense of remorse. A person who isn't a Christian runs toward sin. A Christian runs from sin.

I read about a private school that was having a problem with some of the girls putting on lipstick in the girl's restroom, and then pressing their lips to the mirror leaving lipstick marks. Each afternoon the maintenance man had to clean the mirrors. The principal asked the girls to stop leaving lipstick marks on the mirrors, but the girls continued to press their lips to the mirrors. So the principal called all the girls into the girl's restroom for a meeting with the maintenance man. She explained the problem of lipstick marks, and asked the maintenance man to show the girls how difficult they were to remove. The maintenance man took a long handled squeegee and dipped it in the nearest toilet and proceeded to wipe down the mirror. There were no more lipstick marks left after that. In the same way, a child of God finds sin repulsive.

Sometimes a person says to me, "I must not be a Christian because I did the most terrible thing." I tell them, "The fact that you feel miserable about your sin is actually proof that you ARE a Christian. The third birthmark of a believer is:

(3) You will have a heart to love other Christians

If you have been elected to be a member of God's family, you will have an instinctive love for all Christians. One of my greatest joys in traveling the world leading mission groups is meet believers in other countries. When I meet a Christian in China, I love them immediately. They're my brother or my sister. Do you have that kind of acceptance and love for all Christians?

An elderly lady named Martha came to talk with her pastor because she doubted her salvation. After sharing several verses about assurance with her, she still didn't have peace. The pastor finally said, "Martha, if you were walking down the street and passed a building full of people drinking, cursing, and gambling and next to them was a church full of happy people singing hymns and studying the Bible which building would you rather enter?" She said, "Oh, I'd want to be the people who love the Lord!" Then he showed her this verse from the Bible, "We know we have passed from death to live because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." (I John 3:14) When she read that, she smiled because she realized her preference for being with other believers gave her assurance of her salvation. Do you have assurance of your salvation? You can and you should.

3. ASSURANCE GIVES YOU SECURITY

God wants you to make your calling and election sure. When you have assurance of your salvation you will be secure in Christ. A secure Christian is one who is at peace. Several months

ago, I was making connections through Chicago O'Hare Airport, and my flight to DFW was cancelled. The next flight was full, so I was placed on standby. I discovered there is a great difference between passengers who have a confirmed seat and those who are on the standby list. The ones with confirmed seats were sitting in the gate area calming waiting. Those of us on standby were anxious. After all those who had confirmed reservations were seated, all of us were waiting and hoping our name would be called. Fortunately, I made the flight. But as I reflected on that experience I was reminded there are people on the way to heaven who are the same way. Christians who have assurance are like those with confirmed seats. But a Christian without assurance is anxious and insecure. What kind of Christian are you? Peter points out two wonderful benefits you realize when you are sure about your election.

(1) Security now—You can't fall!

It says in verse 10, "For if you do these things, you will never fall." There's more to the Christian life than just dying and going to heaven. God gives us strength for today. In other words, there's it's not just pie in the sky by and by, it's also steak on your plate while you wait! One of the great blessings is knowing that although we may stumble, we won't completely fall. The Bible says, "If the Lord delights in a man's way he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand." (Psalm 37:23-24) Once you are truly a child of God, you cannot lose your salvation because it isn't up to you. God is holding you up.

If I put a ten foot long 2x4 board on the floor, I wouldn't have any trouble walking the length of it without losing my balance. But if you put that same board 100 feet up in the air, I would be too fearful to try to walk its length. It's the same board with the exact same width. What's the difference? My confidence is increased by the presence of the floor to catch me if I fall, so I don't fear falling. That kind of confidence is exactly the kind of security we can have in Christ. Assurance of your salvation gives you the ability to maintain balance as you walk through life. We can know that even though we may stumble, that He won't let us fall down completely.

Jude, Jesus' half brother, wrote these words in the little epistle before Revelation, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory..." (Jude 24-25)

(2) Future security—Looking forward to your welcome!

Not only do we have security here and now, we have security as we look forward to seeing Jesus face to face. Peter writes, "You will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Do you have the absolute assurance that when you die, you'll be welcomed by Jesus into heaven? It's going to be more wonderful than we can even imagine. The Bible says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (I Corinthians 2:9)

Fanny Crosby was a famous hymn writer who lived from 1820 to 1915. She wrote over 8,000 hymns. She was blind, but she wasn't born blind. Her blindness came as a result of an incompetent doctor who mistakenly placed hot poultices on her eyes when she was suffering from a childhood cold. But she was never bitter about her blindness. At age nine she was already

showing great talent as she wrote: "Oh, what a happy soul I am, / Although I cannot see; / I am resolved that in this world / Contented I will be. / How many blessings I enjoy, / That other people don't; / To weep and sigh because I'm blind, / I cannot, and I won't."

She understood the joy of having the assurance of salvation. She wrote those wonderful words: Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! / Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! / Perfect submission, all is at rest! / I in my Savior am happy and blessed; / Watching and waiting, looking above; / Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Later in life a minister asked her if she was bitter over her blindness. She replied, "If at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind...When I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!"

Are you absolutely sure about your election in Christ? Are you looking forward to that time when He will welcome you into heaven? One of Fanny Crosby's favorite songs said, "When my life work is ended and I cross the swelling tide, / When the bright and glorious morning I shall see; / I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side. / And His smile will be the first to welcome me!"

CONCLUSION

I'll be the first to agree this upcoming Presidential Election is very important for the future of our nation. We must pray, and we must vote. But compared to our eternal election in Christ, this upcoming election is a minor historical hiccup. Charles Spurgeon expressed it better than I can: "In this world it is thought a mighty thing to be elected to the House of Parliament; but how much more honorable to be elected to eternal life; to be elected to the Church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven. Election in this world is but a short-lived thing, but God's election is eternal. Let a man be elected to a seat in the House: seven years must be the longest period he can hold his election. But if you and I be elected according to the Divine purpose, we shall hold our seats when the day-star shall have ceased to burn, when the sun shall have grown dim with age, and when the eternal hills shall have bowed themselves with weakness. If we be chosen of God and precious, then are we chosen forever!"

None of us can be sure about how this political election will turn out. But you *can* be sure of your eternal election. Are you absolutely sure about this election? If you aren't, listen to God's voice as He commands you to repent Obey Him and follow His plan for your life.

OUTLINE

1. YOUR SALVATION IS THE WORK OF GOD

- (1) God's call: Hear His voice and repent!
- (2) God's choice: He elected you to be His child!

2. YOU CAN KNOW FOR SURE THAT YOU'RE SAVED

Spiritual Birthmarks: You will have a...

- (1) Hunger to know God

"You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." *Romans 8:15-16*

- (2) Hatred of sin

"No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning. This is how we know who the children of God are." *1 John 3:9*

- (3) You will have a heart to love other Christians

"We know we have passed from death to live because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." *1 John 3:14*

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- (1) Now—You can't fall!
- (2) Future—Looking forward to your welcome!



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes