

How He Manifested Himself in Eternal Election

Rm 9:1-29; BCF 16

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 25 June 2017, 16:30

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)¹

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In the Belgic Confession of Faith (BCF) Article (Art) 16, Guido de Brès summarises what is taught in a variety of Bible passages, i.e. that, already before man's Fall into sin – in fact, already before the creation of the world, God, in His sovereignty and grace, *chose those human beings whom He would save* through the atoning death of His Son!

This is what we call the *Doctrine of Eternal Election* – a doctrine which, sadly, is rejected by many Christians.

Indeed, for about six years of my life, I taught at a Bible College where most of the students were from Pentecostal and charismatic background. One of the courses I taught was an exegesis of the book of Romans.

Well, I will never forget the reaction of some of those students, when we came to exegeting our NT passage from which I explained to them the doctrine of eternal election.

Despite all the evidence for this doctrine, these students vehemently rejected it by blaming my Reformed upbringing for my (in their eyes) “wrong” exegesis of this passage. Then they tried to exegete this passage in other ways – ways that I will mention later on in this sermon.

Yet, in a very beautiful & truthful way, the BCF Art 16 sums up this doctrine when it says, “*We believe that, when the entire offspring of Adam plunged into perdition and ruin by the transgression of the first man, God manifested himself to be as he is: merciful and just.*”

Did you hear that?

¹ In writing this sermon, I am greatly indebted to my main source whose guidance I greatly appreciate: HYDE, Daniel R. 2008. *With heart and mouth: an exposition of the Belgic Confession*. Grandville, MI : Reformed Fellowship, Inc. pp.197-206. At other times, I wrote on the same topic using a variety of different sources. But, this time, I decided to use Hyde's chapter divisions, although I have changed these somewhat around.

After man's Fall into sin, God did not suddenly (for the first time) *become* merciful and just; no, He then simply *demonstrated* what He is (and always has been): merciful and just!

God demonstrated – God manifested – Himself as merciful and just!
On this note, then, here are the three main points of this sermon...

- God's Majesty Manifested in Mercy
- God's Majesty Manifested in Justice
- Our Response

God's Majesty Manifested in Mercy

My brother & sister, as you & I reflect upon God's predestination of His elect, we firstly marvel at His mercy.

And that's exactly what the BCF Art 16 does!

Please hear what it says...

"...God manifested Himself as... Merciful, in rescuing and saving from this perdition those whom, in His eternal and unchangeable counsel, He has elected in Jesus Christ our Lord by His pure goodness, without any consideration of their works."

My brother & sister, in hearing these words, what does the born-again child of God do? Yes, what do you & I do?

Well, don't you just stand in reverential fear and wonder!? I mean, what is more mind-bending than God's election!?

You see, does election not reveal how big God truly is and how small you & I really are?

Indeed, it goes beyond our thought and reasoning as to why God has chosen any – including you & me!?

Yes, we will in a few minutes discuss our NT passage (Rm 9), but do you remember another Bible passage on eternal election? Yes, do you remember Eph 1:3-5?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for

adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...²

My brother & sister, I can remember hearing these words for the hundredth time, yet hearing for the first time what it said about *me*, my *God*, and my *salvation*!

Yes, do these words not knock the Christian to his/her knees as he/she beholds the glory of God – His sovereignty, and His mercy!? Well, BCF Art 16 highlights four things about God’s merciful counsel in electing even you & me...

Firstly, that God’s electing counsel was *God’s* counsel! *He* did the choosing! Yes, as Paul says to the Ephesians, “...*we have... been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will*” (Eph 1:11).

The **second** thing about God’s merciful counsel is seen in the fact that He chose *individual* persons, and not a certain class or group. No, God elected particular men, women, and children. You see, talking of God’s *purpose in election*,³ Rm 9:13 says, “**Jacob I have loved...!**” Of course, this is a quote from Mal 1:2 in which God says, “...**Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? ... Yet I have loved Jacob...**”

The **third** thing about God’s merciful electing counsel is that it was *eternal* and *unchangeable*. This is clear from Eph 1:4, “...**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...**” Also Jn 6:37, “**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**”⁴

See the mercy in God’s electing counsel – eternal and unchangeable!?

The **fourth** way in which God’s electing mercy shines through is that it comes without any respect to your & my works!

Look, is this not clear from Rm 9:10-12, “...**when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though**

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 1:3–5). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ Rm 9:10-13 (especially v.11), ***And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”***

⁴ And Jn 10:29, “**My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.**”

they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might stand, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² *she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger’*”?

My brother & sister, what mercy – and what grace – that God did not contemplate our works when He decided to elect us, because if God had to elect human beings based on their works/deeds, He would never have chosen any, let alone us! That is why Eph 1:4 says, “...**He (God) chose us in Him (Christ)...**”⁵

Dear Wainui member, young person, child, do you doubt that you are one of God’s elect? If so, is your doubt rooted in your fear that you have sinned too much?

Well, if that’s the reason for your doubt, then doubt no more, for God was not looking at any human being’s good works when He chose some. No, God was looking at the blood of His son which is powerful to render the vilest sinner clean before God!

Thus, have you received Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Saviour of your life – not just as your Saviour, but also as your Lord whom you lovingly obey? Are the fruits of His Holy Spirit seen in you? Then, see yourself, by grace through faith, as one of God’s elect!

So far point 1 – God Manifested in Mercy

Here is point 2...

God Manifested in Justice

My brother & sister, the doctrine of eternal election also makes manifest God’s *justice*, for the Bible clearly teaches that God has not chosen everyone to salvation, but has left some to perish in their sin – original and actual sin!

In the Reformed faith, this manifestation of God’s justice is often called “reprobation” (from Latin, “reprobare” which means “disapprove”)⁶ or also called “double predestination.”

The Bible clearly shows this e.g. in our NT passage (Rm 9).

⁵ Eph 1:3-4, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** ⁴ **even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.**”

⁶ Late Middle English (as a verb): from Latin reprobatus- ‘disapproved’, from the verb reprobare, from re- (expressing reversal) + probare ‘approve’ (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/reprobate>)

You see, Rm 9:18 says, “*So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*”

Rm 9:21 explains how the potter has the right “*to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use...*”

The next verse (22) explains how God, for His own purposes, “*...endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.*”

That is Romans 9!

Then Peter also says (in 1 Pt 2:8), “*They (unbelievers) stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined⁷ to do.*”

Jude, the brother of Christ, says in v.4 of his letter, “*For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated⁸ for this condemnation...*”

Thus, their condemnation was prepared, destined and designated.

Now, it’s important to understand that this condemnation cannot be blamed on God, for the basis on which God manifests His justice in “leaving” or “passing by” those whom He does not elect in mercy, is *their sin and unbelief*.

This is the way the Canons of Dort have described it: that “*...Out of His most free, most just, blameless, and unchangeable good pleasure, God has decreed to leave them in the common misery into which they have by their own fault plunged themselves ...*”⁹

Then it says, “*...This is the decree of reprobation, which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought is blasphemous!), but rather declares Him to be its fearsome, blameless, and just judge and avenger.*”¹⁰

Well, we have now heard points 1 & 2 of this sermon:

⁷ ἐτέθησαν Aorist Indicative Passive 3rd Person Plural of τίθημι: to assign someone to a particular task, function, or role—‘to appoint, to designate, to assign, to give a task to’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 482). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁸ προγεγραμμένοι Perfect Passive Participle Masculine Plural Nominative of προγράφω³: to write in advance or in anticipation of—‘to write beforehand’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 396). New York: United Bible Societies).

⁹ Cf. Canons of Dort (I, 15)

¹⁰ Canons of Dort (ibid)

- Point 1: God’s Majesty Manifested in His Mercy;
- Point 2: God’s Majesty Manifested in His Justice

This brings us now to the last point...

Our Response

As I have said in the introduction, many people – even some who profess to be Christians – reject the doctrine of eternal election.

How do they manage to escape a doctrine so clearly explained in Scripture – especially in Romans 9?

Well, in at least four ways:¹¹

Firstly, by avoiding Rm 9 altogether.

- Indeed, for some Christians (way too many), making a hard effort into studying the Scripture, is too difficult. So, they resort to easy texts, like Jn 3:16, which they quote out of context.
- You see, they will say, “But there can’t be such a thing as eternal election (predestination), for Jn 3:16 is then saying, *‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.’*” “See?” they say, “*God so loved the world...!* i.e. every single person!”
- But what they cleanly forget is that, just a few verses earlier in the same chapter, Christ told Nicodemus, “...*unless one is born of water and (that is) the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*”
- In other words, it is only those who are regenerated by God’s Holy Spirit who will enter the kingdom of God. Yes, they are the ones who receive Christ by grace through faith! But they receive Him, because they have been eternally elected (predestined) by God to do so!
- So, what does “*For God so loved the world...*” mean?
- Well, it can only mean that *God so loved His elect from all nations of the world that He gave His only Son, that*

¹¹ Cf. RC Sproul – audio sermon at <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/israels-rejection-gods-purpose/>

whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life!

- So, that's the first way in which some Christians manage to reject the doctrine of eternal election – by simply avoiding Romans 9 and other passages which clearly stipulate the reality of eternal election.

Here is the **second way** by which they reject election: by claiming that, when Rm 9 talks about Jacob and Esau, it is not talking about the election of individuals *unto eternal salvation*, but about the election of individuals for the purpose of *forming nations out of them*.

- Well, what such people miss, is the larger context in which the Apostle Paul has written Rm 9.
- You see, everything else the Apostle Paul had been saying from Rm 1 through to Rm 8, has all to do with the gracious steps God has taken to bring individual people – not to *nation building* (as these sceptics assert) – but to eternal salvation!
- So, what Paul (in giving the names of Jacob & Esau) is simply doing in Rm 9, is: he is giving a clear and excellent illustration of God's eternal election of individuals unto eternal salvation!

Well, here's the **third way** by which some miss the clear doctrine of eternal election (predestination) – and you must admit, it's almost the same as the second way: by claiming that Rm 9 is all about the electing of individuals for *earthly* blessings.

- But again, they're taking Rm 9 out of its context.
- I mean, as if the Apostle Paul had just before, in Rm 8:29-30, said that, "...those whom He (God) foreknew He also predestined... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also gave a BMW and mansion, and a yacht..."
- No, no, no! Paul said, "***For those whom He (God) foreknew He also predestined...***"³⁰ ***And those whom He predestined***

He also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom He justified he also glorified.”

- See? It’s all about predestining individuals for *eternal salvation*!
- It’s exactly what God’s Word also says (in Acts 13:48), there in Antioch (Pisidia) where many Gentiles received Christ as their Saviour & Lord after they had heard Paul’s preaching: “...***and as many as were appointed¹² to eternal life believed***.”
- See? Justification of individuals for eternal life!

Well, the **fourth way** by which some miss the clear doctrine of eternal election (predestination), is by claiming Rm 9 is indeed about the election of individuals towards eternal salvation – but eternal election which happens by God’s *foreknowledge*.

- Well, in this, they are no different than Prof Arminius and his followers in 17th century Holland, who claimed that God’s eternal election of His loved ones happened by God looking, as it were, *through the tunnel of time* into the future. And, as God looked down this tunnel of time, He saw all those who would one day, out of their own freewill, choose Him. So, only those about whom God foreknew that they would choose Him, it’s exactly those whom God then predestined for eternal salvation.
- Well, how absurd!
- I mean, does Rm 9:10ff not clearly stipulate that “...***when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might stand,¹³ not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’¹³ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*”**

¹² τεταγμένοι Perfect Passive Participle Masculine Plural Nominative of **τάσσω**: to assign someone to a particular task, function, or role—‘to appoint, to designate, to assign, to give a task to’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 482). New York: United Bible Societies).

¹³ Literally: “...so that God’s plan according to His choice might stand...” (ἵνα ἡ κατ’ ἐκλογὴν πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ μένη).

Wow! It's so clear!

Yes, there is freewill in your election! But, the freewill is not yours!
It is *God's*!

My brother & sister,

Because we live in a democracy, we as "Westerners" know that our politicians must answer to the will of the majority of voters!

So, "Western" society has come to automatically infer that the majority opinion is also the right opinion – is the right way to go!

Well, this way, our society has drifted away from submission to God's will!¹⁴

Instead, our starting point should/must always be the will of our Sovereign & Almighty God!

So, let me ask: How do you react to this doctrine – the doctrine of eternal election, by which God in mercy predestined some to eternal salvation, yet passing all others by?

Are you not in awe?

You see, point 1 and point 2 have shown us God's *awe-inspiring majesty*¹⁵ seen 1) in His *mercy* and 2) in His *justice*.

- Yes, God's awe-inspiring majesty seen in His *mercy*, because which human being could ever have thought/dreamed that God could love him/her so much that He would decree His Precious Son's horrible cross-death to save him/her?
- And God's awe-inspiring majesty seen in His *justice*, because the sheer thought of those whom God has left in their sin & unbelief, makes the Christian shudder in awe of what the Sovereign & Almighty God has rescued him/her from.

¹⁴ Good point which I have adopted & adapted from NYMEYER, B.L. & BEZUYEN, A. s.a. Faith of our Fathers: studies in the Belgic Confession. Chino, CA : First United Reformed Church. p.71.

¹⁵ John Calvin said that the doctrine of election manifests "God's dread majesty" (*horribilis Dei maiestatis*). (cf. Calvin, Institutes, 3.20.17; cf. 3.23.7; also cf. Hyde, *ibid*:217).

My brother & sister, Rm 9:6 says, “...*not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel*¹⁶...” i.e. not all who are in the nation of Israel are God’s elect!

By the same token: not all who are on the church’s membership role are necessarily right with God!

Surely, I don’t know who exactly are God’s elect. I can’t see into people’s hearts – only God can.

But here, as we hear God’s Word, the Gospel call is going out. What do you do with it? How do you respond?

AMEN (2679 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁶ οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ