

Election and Divine Love

Isaiah 43 is an encouragement to the elect in Israel that God would care for his people. It is a passage of comfort to the elect who are always brought to a place of adversity to prove their faith. Wonderful as this passage is to the Lord's people, what I want to draw out here is the connection between God's love and God's chosen people. God only ever loves his own, not all. Unpopular as this concept may be today (it was not unpopular for hundreds of years to our wiser forefathers) it is entirely Biblical. God loves the elect and he loves no other.

That this is the case is seen clearly from the statements God makes about Jacob and Esau. He loved one and hated the other; one was called to be the father of the Lord's chosen, the other was called to judgment. This is very familiar to us (see Romans 9). In fact Israel herself is a picture of divine election in comparison to the nations. That Israel was loved is without doubt; and God states that despite being a small and insignificant state, she alone was chosen to serve him, while the remaining nations were left in their sin and idolatry, only a few being spared.¹ One small elect nation was loved, the majority of the world's population was left to judgment. Such facts are incontrovertible.

In this paper I want to look at some specific passages, beginning with Isaiah 43, that demonstrate this connection between God's love and God's choosing.

Isaiah 43

The elect called

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; you *are* mine.' (Isa 43:1)

In this chapter God addresses the elect: those called by name by God into relationship: the covenant people who belong to the Lord and have an intimate connection with God.

The elect preserved

Since you were precious in my sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life. (Isa 43:4)

God states categorically that he loves this people, indeed he has always loved this people. He gives them honour because they are precious to him. Other people are given up for the sake of this elect company. Verse three gives the examples of Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba (Meroe, an African nation in Ethiopia) who were destroyed in ransoming Israel. The enemies of the elect are always destroyed by God who protects his people as the apple of his eye. God is encouraging his people at that time that though Babylonia threatens Israel, the elect will always be protected. The point is that non-elect nations are judged and condemned while the elect are preserved because they are loved.

The elect purposed

- Everyone who is called by my name, whom I have created for my glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him. (Isa 43:7)
- 'You *are* my witnesses,' says the LORD, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he. Before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after me.' (Isa 43:10)

¹ Such as Naaman, Nebuchadnezzar.

- 'I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and *there was* no foreign *god* among you; therefore you *are* my witnesses,' Says the LORD. (Isa 43:12)
- This people I have formed for myself; they shall declare my praise. (Isa 43:21)

Here we see the purpose of God for the elect. They are created to manifest the glory of God; to be witnesses to the Lord himself to declare his praise. This privileged testimony is afforded to no other. Only the elect declare God's glory and only the elect are loved. Only someone who knows the love of God in his heart can effectively declare the character of God to others.

The elect are loved unto a purpose. It is the church that demonstrates the glory of God to men and angels (Eph 3:10). God loves these people, saves them out of sin, rescues them from the world, gives other peoples as a ransom in their place and uses them to his glory. The elect are loved, others are destroyed.

Exodus 19:4-6

4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth *is* mine.

6 And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Here we have the same construction: calling, choosing, separation, love. The Israelites were distinguished from all the other nations and even great empires like Egypt were destroyed by God in favour of her (Egypt's condition degenerated after the Exodus).²

Though the words 'calling', 'choosing' and 'love' are not used, the truth of these divine acts is revealed by the text. God brought Israel to himself by delivering her from Egypt. This is a calling. Then God says that Israel (meaning the covenant-keeping remnant within Israel) will be his special treasure above all people; this is love and commitment.

God's treasure is the covenant people, the elect. It is only these that he loves. They are brought into relationship with God to be a nation of holy priests, to manifest God's glory and share his word.

Deut 7:6-9

6 For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

8 but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9 Therefore know that the LORD your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

² God deals with the nations according to his purposes for the elect. His focus is upon his divine plan for the covenant people, and the nations of the earth find their place only in their connection with them. When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD's portion *is* His people; Jacob *is* the place of His inheritance. (Deut 32:8-9). The immediate application of these verses was to the land of Canaan. Canaan's cursed son's inherited this land temporarily as tenants until Abraham's heirs, the nation of Israel (not yet formed), would come to take it. The seven nations of Canaan (some of the earliest known cities) were destroyed to make way for God's chosen people.

Using similar words, here we see the calling and choosing of Israel as the Lord's people as his special treasure in connection with God's love. This passage emphasises the love of God for Israel in contrast to the lack of love for all other nations. He chose Israel as the weakest and smallest of nations and set his love upon her out of his sovereign good pleasure.

The nation chosen is the nation loved. Only the elect are loved by God.

Deut 14:2

For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who *are* on the face of the earth.

This is a summarised reiteration of the previous passage. Israel is holy to God (separated from other nations) and is the only state chosen to be his people. This derives from God's loves for her as his special treasure. This concept is continually reiterated in the OT.

For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for His special treasure. (Psa 135:4)

Jer 31:1-4

1 'At the same time,' says the LORD, 'I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.'

2 Thus says the LORD: 'The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness -- Israel, when I went to give him rest.'

3 The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: 'Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.'

4 Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel!

Again the same declaration. The Lord is the God of the families of elect Israel alone, they are his people and they are loved with an everlasting love.

Hos 11:1

When Israel *was* a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Before Israel was established as a nation, a mere child, God loved him as a son. This eternal, electing love. Indeed, this prophecy has an equal application to the Lord Jesus (Matt 2:15) as his elect Son (Isa 42:1) and Messiah.

Mal 3:16-18

16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them*; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

17 "They shall be mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him."

18 Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Malachi is the prophet who first demonstrated the hatred God had for Esau and the love he had for Jacob (Mal 1:2-3, taken up by Paul in Rm 9:13). He understood the concept of the elect being separated from the wicked. Here Malachi is emphasising this separation, based in God's eternal choosing. The elect are those who fear the Lord, who meditate on his name and are heard by God. They are remembered in his book and are declared to be his, 'They shall be mine'. As elect they are loved like Jacob and are considered by God to be his jewels and loved - the burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. 'I have loved you,' says the LORD. (Mal 1:1-2). The wicked (reprobate) are distinguished as those who do not serve God and are cursed, as the prophet goes on to explain in the next chapter.

Jn 16:27

For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

Jn 17:23

I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me.

This is spoken to the disciples in private by Jesus as he neared the cross. They are elect, indeed not only chosen by God but also personally selected by the Lord to be his companions (Judas was not with them at this point). God loves the elect and they love him in return.

Rev 3:9

Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie -- indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Spoken to the suffering but persevering elect gathered at Philadelphia, the risen and glorified Christ distinguishes his people from the false professing believers on the basis that he loves the elect and condemns the wicked. The elect are protected and persevere because they are and have been loved by God and chosen.

Conclusion

Since it is beyond doubt that God only loves his people, his sheep, his little flock, his bride, we need to be very careful in our preaching and teaching. Under no circumstances can we justify giving the impression that God loves everyone. Such a concept is not only untrue and alien to scripture, but it fosters a false hope in sinners who then think they are safe if they have divine favour.

There is only one thing God loves in this fallen universe, and that is his beloved Son. God's love is focused on the Son, his heart's desire. Everything else in this world is touched by sin and the curse; even the natural order is corrupted, though it never rebelled and it longs for its own redemption at the end. The church is beloved by God because it was placed into Christ from eternity. The elect are that company of people God chose from his good pleasure, to be united to Christ; to be His body. As such, they are loved since they are in the beloved as far as God is concerned.

Thus God loves his Son, and those who are placed in him, the elect covenant people of God. To declare that God loves all men is to seriously misunderstand Biblical theology. God cannot love those who are outside Christ and are full of sin. Neither could God place his eternal love upon those he has destined to condemnation from eternity. God can only do perfect and fulfilled things;³ his love is full, complete and eternal. It does not dissipate nor diminish. It never leaves the object it is placed upon. Thus God can never love any who are outside Christ. God's love is to the elect only.

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³ **Eccles 3:14** - I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does *it*, that men should fear before Him.