

How Does God Make His Choices John 1:35-51

Over the years of my being a Christian, pastoring two churches, and attending many bible studies, I have had the experience of rubbing shoulders with a great number of Christians, with some of those Christians being on very solid ground in their faith and following of the Lord Jesus, but some not!

And yes, with all the many struggles of daily life, each of us can at times be experiencing either of those conditions. But for the purposes of our study today, I will make the assumption and frame the content of our considerations with the understanding that we are each believers in Christ and any differences we might have will not be questions involving eternal salvation, but rather will be in our beliefs and our sanctifying understanding of what our Lord has to say to us within these scriptures.

With that being said, may we return to the passage of scripture that we have been studying here in John chapter 1, words that tell us about the Lord Jesus as He began to make the choices of the men who would be His disciples. Here in verse 35 we read,

³⁵ The next day again John (the Baptist) was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus

saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:35-51)

As we learned in an earlier study, over the days that would follow, along with these few men, the Lord Jesus would also choose more disciples. Some of them, twelve, He would give the special Spiritual Gift of being "Apostles".

Those twelve are spoken about in the Book of Matthew chapter 10. Listen there, beginning in verse 2 we read,

²These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4)

As I read these precious words of our scripture, I confess that I often find that instead of my discovering all the answers to my questions about our Lord, I instead simply find that I have more and more questions.

And so it is as I read here about our Lord making choices about who would be His disciples. Simply put, "Why did Jesus choose these particular men?" "Was there something special about them? He did seem to know something about them before they came to Him. He said so when He told Nathaniel that He saw him under the fig tree. And He also was able to know the hidden realms of Nathaniel's thoughts and personality. But was that why He chose these men. Had He seen something special in each of them that convinced Him to choose them?"

May I say to us that while this kind of thought process is common to our natural way of thinking, that we would make our choices by doing research on each person's background, finding out all we could to make sure these were the

exact right people. But folks, that is not the way God does it and that is not why our God chose these men.

And yes, the thoughts that I will share with us over these next few moments will again reveal my unswerving belief in the "Total Sovereignty of God" and in His "Providential ways".

And while I am aware that many who choose to follow this website each week have some differing views, may I ask that you bear with me for these few moments and consider carefully what these scriptures say to us about these matters.

And may we begin by using what has become one of my favorite chapters of scripture within the bible, Psalm 139. This blessed Psalm is filled to the brim with revelations of just how sovereign and how providential our Lord really is. Read along with me! Verse 1,

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

13 For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are
your works; my soul knows it very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every
one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was
none of them.
17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
18 If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am
still with you.
19 Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!
O men of blood, depart from me!
20 They speak against you with malicious intent;
your enemies take your name in vain.
21 Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
22 I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.
23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting! (Psalm 139:1-24)

Oh dear Christian, I often marvel at just how well our Lord knows each one of us, how well He knows me personally and intimately. Our Lord leaves nothing out as He declares how He has known me from the moment He wove me together in my mother's womb until the very last breath I will take in this life. And then, no doubt, He also knows my eternal future. Nothing is outside of His personal and intimate care and guidance.

And I have often cringed at statements from my fellow Christians as they try to explain why the various writers of scripture, for this Psalm, King David, said the things that are given to us in their writings. But for me, I have no such questions.

As God formed those men's bodies, minds and souls within their mother's wombs, He also formed their personalities and their manner of thinking. And He did it in such a way so that they would express the truths of His scriptures in the exact way that He wanted them to say and to write them, with no variation

whatsoever, no outside influences, no personal opinions, no varying beliefs. That is why these words are and will forever remain the very "Breath of God".

And so then, instead of Jesus perhaps sending out His angels into all the world to find the exact right men to be His disciples, or did some other kind of search. God knew each of these men intimately even before they were born, as He formed them in their mother's womb.

Recall that I have often said to you, my own personality is one of "visual thinking". I see my thoughts in a very "visual" manner. And just as I have often imagined those moments when Jesus first created Adam from the dust of the earth, so also, after a fashion, that is the manner that He has created you and me within our mother's womb. Those words about Adam in Genesis chapter 2, ⁷ then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

Folks, for me this is one of the most intimate moments in human life. God, the Lord Jesus, after forming Adam as a man, much in the way we would give "mouth to mouth respiration" Jesus breathed into Adam the breath of life and Adam became a living soul.

And yes, in that same way, over the nine months our mommas carried us, our Lord was weaving us together in our mother's womb, our bodies, our intellect, our personalities, our facial features, and yes, even some of our abnormalities, everything that would make us to be "us", unique and different from everyone else on the face of the earth.

And yes, as He gave us our first breath, God gave us our life to do with it all the plans that He has for us, plans that He devised within the Trinity before the first foundations of the earth were laid.

And while we might not be able to understand or even agree with those kinds of thoughts and plans of God, these scriptures are jammed-packed with evidence of His "Sovereign Hand" at work from the very beginning.

And so then, the question that we began with, "How did Jesus go about making the choices that He made with each of the disciples?" Folks, I have no doubt that this is exactly how He did it. He made His choices long before the

foundations of the earth were laid. He tells us that in no uncertain words in the Book of Ephesians chapter 1. Listen!

³ 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. (Ephesians 1:3-5)

Oh dear Christian, dear disciple of the Lord Jesus, our Lord clearly made His choices long before the foundations of the earth were laid. And it was only here, as Jesus came to the earth to be the Christ and to carry forward His plan for the redemption of humankind that His plans have been revealed to us.

He didn't just know Nathaniel from seeing him under that fig tree. He knew Nathaniel before the foundations of the earth were laid. And He wove every part of Nathaniel together in his mother's womb, his body, his personality, His manner of thinking.

So then, our Lord's knowledge of those disciples wasn't just for the moments when they were being chosen. His knowledge of them and of us is intimate and at every moment. He had been their guide and helper all the days leading up to that moment and He would continue to be their helper and their guide for all the remaining days that they would live.

Please bear with me for a moment as we look carefully at what this Psalm 139 has to say. Listen to these words . . .

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4)

Folks, we need to take these words into our hearts and minds and know that this is how much our Lord knew about each of His disciples before He chose them. He not only formed their bodies, their minds, their personalities in their mother's wombs, He generously guided and helped them as they went about daily life.

And we need also to realize that this is how much the Lord Jesus knows about you and me and how intimate He is to our very personal thoughts and behaviors. Listen to these words again.

- ¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me!
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. (Psalm 139:1-4)

Oh dear Christian, our Lord really is speaking about us in these words, about you and me. How often have you sat quietly in solitude musing about your neighbor or about a relative, having thoughts that you believe are private and unknowable to anyone else. But no my dear friends, your thoughts are not private. God “discerns your thoughts”. He knows every word long before you can ever say them.

And He knows your and my behaviors long before we ever do those things.

Nothing is private to us! Nothing! Our Lord knows every book we read, every movie we watch, every conversation we have.

In verse 7, the question is asked,

- ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
- ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall guide me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
- ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light about me be night,”
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7-12)

Dear Christian, our Lord loves us and He will not allow us to wander out of His care and guidance, or to find somewhere to “hide from Him”. His Holy Spirit is with us everywhere we go and at every moment.

So then, back to our question . . . “How did God make His choices?” May I suggest that He did not make a choice in the same manner that you and I would make such choices.

Any choices that our Lord made were part of a divine plan that He put into place within the councils of the Trinity before time began.

These men and their involvements within the beginning moments of what we now call the “Church” were simply a part of God’s sovereign plan. Jesus simply brought that plan into fruition as He called each of these men by name and called them to serve the purposes for which they were ordained from the foundations of the earth.

That my dear friends is my understanding from the scriptures as to how Jesus made the choices that He made. And while as we read these words of scripture His choices might have looked so man-made, that too is how God seems always to carry forward His plans and His purposes.

God does use the willful choices of men as He carries forward with all His activities, men and women’s behaviors “concurring” with His plans and purposes, causing it all to look like the free will of man doing much of the decision making. But it is in fact the Spirit of God at work within each heart bringing into full fruition the plans that God has already made.

Before we finish with our thoughts today about how the Lord Jesus made His choices in His selection of those disciples of His day, may we consider how He has done much the same in His calling of you and me to be His disciples in our day.

And no, none of us will be called to be His “Apostles” as the first twelve. We are only called to be “disciples”, and disciples we must be.

But may I strongly suggest that our beginnings as disciples are certainly much after the same fashion as were those first disciples.

Just as with those first twelve men, you and I were also “knit carefully together with our Lord’s own hands within our mother’s womb”. That is how our Lord does it, dear Christian. It was no different with us than it was with them. Our beginnings were just as intimate with the Lord as it was with the first twelve.

But unfortunately for most of us we might never be able to discern how God’s Sovereign Hand has worked within us. Our perception of God’s involvement in our life is much more on a human level.

So for us, as we realize that we are being called to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, it’s often when a strange and mysterious attraction begins to take place within our soul, a special desire within our spirit that causes us to want to draw nearer and to know more about God and about His word, and especially to know more about the person of Jesus Christ and about His teachings.

I’m reminded of many occasions in the scriptures when great crowds would be so drawn to the Lord Jesus that He would nearly be overrun by them.

Men like Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who climbed a tree just to get a clearer look at Jesus.

In our day, we hear people tell stories about having traveled long distances to hear Billy Graham tell them about Jesus and about salvation, while not really knowing exactly why they were doing it.

Jesus explained that mysterious experience in John chapter 6 when He said,
³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:37-40)

And in verse 44 of that same chapter, Jesus said,
⁴⁴No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)

And also, in verse 65 of that same chapter, Jesus said,

⁶⁵ . . . “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (John 6:65)

Oh dear Christian, this is how you and I are chosen to be our Lord's disciples. We might never be able to fully understand it or explain it to others. But when in God's plan He calls us to Himself for salvation and to be His disciples, that irresistible drawing by His Holy Spirit will do a mysterious work within our souls, a work not unlike the work that took place in the first disciples, a work that began back there in those first moments when we were knit together in our mother's womb. And it is then that we will, of our own will, say “Yes” Lord. Yes, I will follow you! I will be your disciple. I will be a “fisher of men”.

Pray with me!