

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ELECTION?

INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE

Before you begin to read this article, please get your Bible and have it close by you as you read. This article is designed to point out what the Bible, itself, actually has to say about the important DOCTRINE OF ELECTION. References from the Scriptures will be given to support every point that is made, and it is suggested that you look up each of these references for yourself, as they occur. As you begin to see the rich and full support of Scripture for this doctrine, it will, no doubt, become apparent to you why this truth has been one of the most prized and cherished ones loved and defended by the people of God for thousands of years. However, Satan also knows how vital this doctrine is and it is for this reason that no other single truth in all the history of the church has been so viciously and consistently attacked as the TRUTH OF ELECTION. Satan's primary goal is to bring dishonor on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To believe in, to rejoice in, and to support the doctrine of election is to honor Christ. To deny the teaching of election is to dishonor the Lord and to deny the glory that is due Him, and **Him alone**.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ELECTION

There are at least three types of election spoken of in the Scriptures:

- A. Election of an individual to an office or to a work.
- B. National Election: the election or choice of a nation for a particular work.
- C. The election of individuals from a state of death in sin to a life in Christ.

Each of these needs is to be considered briefly in the light of Scripture, but particular attention must be paid to the last phase of election mentioned--in fact, this election of individuals to salvation is usually what people have in mind when they think or speak of the DOCTRINE OF ELECTION. No matter what type of election is being spoken of in the Bible, the basic idea is always "to choose from, to pick out from." Notice this basic idea in the discussions that follow of the several different types of election taught in the Bible.

A. ELECTION OF AN INDIVIDUAL TO AN OFFICE OR WORK

Many times in Scripture God chooses an individual to fill a particular office or to do a certain work. Jeremiah was chosen or elected by God to be a prophet long before he was born (Jeremiah 1:5). God chose David to be king over Israel (I Kings 8:16). Jesus chose His apostles to do a certain and particular work (Acts 1:2). These few references will suffice to show that there is indeed in the Bible an election or choice by God of certain individuals to particular offices or to perform certain tasks. Notice that none of these individuals volunteered for the job or office; none of them co-operated with God in

their choice. God did all the choosing, all the electing. God did not choose these individuals because in His prior knowledge of all events He saw that they would come to love Him and gladly do His will. In fact God called Paul when Paul was actively opposing Him (Acts 9:1-18). He chose Peter even though He knew that Peter would later deny Him (Luke 22:54-62). In other words, God did not choose these individuals to do a work for Him because they were worthy to be chosen; rather He chose them out of His mercy, in spite of themselves and their sinfulness, **BECAUSE HE DESIRED TO DO SO**. He did what it pleased Him to do. His choice or election originated entirely in Himself and was not based on any conditions that must be met in those whom He chose.

B. NATIONAL ELECTION

The same general principles discussed immediately above also apply to another type of God's election taught in the Bible--*His National Election*. God has chosen particular nations to do particular things or to fulfill certain destinies. The most prominent example of national election in Scripture, of course, pertains to the nation of Israel. God chose Israel to be His particular people of covenant privilege. Israel is often called God's elect (Isaiah 45:4). God chose Israel and determined that it was through this nation that He would give the law, the prophets, and eventually this was the nation through whom the Savior would come, according to the flesh.

The question is, why did God choose Israel? Why didn't He choose some other nation? Why make particular choice of any nation? Why practice discrimination against the nations that were not chosen? Did God choose Israel because she was larger? Smaller?

The Scriptural answer is plain. It is found in Deuteronomy 7:6-8. This Scripture plainly states that the choice of God was not because Israel had any distinctive traits about her which set her apart from the other nations. The only reason why God chose Israel was because He loved her. His choice was free and sovereign. He did not love her because she was loveable; on the contrary she was stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful. God's love for Israel originated entirely within Himself and is one of the wonderful mysteries of His Divine Person.

C. THE ELECTION OF INDIVIDUALS TO SALVATION

The climax of this discussion has now arrived. God's election, selection, choice of a people to Himself, in Christ Jesus, for eternal salvation is a basically important truth that deserves much prayerful meditation and study.

It would be well to state the doctrine as concisely and clearly as possible at the very start. Election is that decree of God which He eternally makes, by which, with sovereign freedom, He chooses to Himself a people, upon whom He determines to set His love, whom He rescues from sin and death through Jesus Christ, unto Himself in everlasting glory. Every clause in this definition is upheld by a great mass of Scripture as will be shown in the following discussion. But first, why was election necessary

anyway? Why did man need salvation? What did he need salvation from? If he did need salvation, could he not save himself without the need of outside help? If he was not able to completely save himself could he not at least co-operate with whomsoever it was that was trying to save him? These questions must be carefully considered in the light of Scripture in order to get a correct teaching on the subject of election.

Adam, the father of all humanity, disobeyed God and brought ruin upon himself, but not only himself was affected, but all of his posterity, that is, all the human race (Rom. 5:12). Paul tells us that the result of sin is death. Physical death was included as punishment for Adam's sin, but a much worse death than physical death was also under consideration--a death in sin. A man may be very much alive physically and indeed quite healthy and still be dead in trespasses and in sins (Ephesians 2:1-5). Now, as it is true that a man who is physically dead cannot perform any physical activity, it is also true that a man who is dead in sin cannot perform any spiritual activity (I Cor. 2:14). He is just as dead to spiritual things *including salvation* as a physically dead man is to physical things. How much help could a dead man give to a doctor who is trying to bring him back to life after he has been dead for some time? The answer to this foolish question, of course, is that he would be able to give the doctor no help whatsoever, because he is dead. The same answer would have to be given if the question were asked about how much a man dead in sins would be able to help get himself out of this state of death into a state of spiritual life and fellowship with God.

The reader may think this discussion about being dead in sin has nothing to do with election and that the above paragraph has been completely irrelevant and off the subject--but not so! This discussion is necessary to prepare us to correctly answer the above question. We now can answer why man needed salvation--because he was dead in sins. What did he need salvation from?--this state of death into which he fell in Adam (Romans 5:12). Could he not save himself or at least co-operate with someone for his salvation? Absolutely not! Why? Because he was dead and dead men are capable of no activity. Is salvation then impossible? With men, yes, salvation is impossible. God must do the work of salvation, from beginning to end (Mark 10:27). How then does God save and who does He save? This brings us face to face with the Bible teaching of God's election.

Considered against the background of man's being dead in sin, election is seen very clearly. Since the whole of humanity is fallen in sin from which they cannot save themselves, none will be saved apart from the redeeming grace of God which is in Christ Jesus. **ELECTION IS THE SOVEREIGN CHOICE OF GOD AS TO WHO MAY RECEIVE THIS GRACE.** Election is God's design to choose from sinful mankind all of whom deserve condemnation, those who He will save. The source of this salvation is Jesus Christ, and the means through which this salvation is applied to the individual is the Holy Spirit, but the actual choice of who will be included in this salvation is the work of God the Father (I Peter 1:2).

It must be emphasized that the basic idea in election is that of choice or selection. We must admit this if we study the Scriptures and give a true and faithful interpretation of the words that are contained therein. Two Greek words, contained in the original of

the New Testament plainly show this basic idea of sovereign choice in election. EKLEKTOS is an adjective signifying "the chosen". This word is used in such passages as Matt. 24:22,24; Romans 8:33; Col. 3:12. The same word is translated "chosen" in Romans 16:13 and Rev. 17:14 among other places. EKLOGE is a noun, meaning "that which is chosen". It is used in Romans 9:11; 11:5; 7:28; I Thess. 1:4; II Peter 1:10. Even if you had never heard of the doctrine of election before now, if you have carefully referred to each of the Scriptures mentioned, you are now perfectly aware that election is a very Scriptural doctrine. Some ministers are so opposed to this clear Bible teaching that they would much prefer that those who hear them would steer clear of the many passages which teach this doctrine. This approach involves dishonesty and an unwillingness to bow before Scripture. Others will admit that election is taught in the Bible but will deny in several subtle ways, that it is talking about the choice of some sinners out of the whole race of sinners to salvation. The perversions of the doctrine of election will be considered a little later, but now it is necessary to get back to the discussion of the Bible teaching of election itself.

The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor (Ephesians 1:4; II Timothy 1:9). These and these only, He purposed to save. God could have chosen to save all men (for He had the power and authority to do so) or He could have chosen to save none (for He was under no obligation to show mercy to any). But He did neither. Instead, He chose to save some and to leave the rest in their sinful condition. Men, by their sins, have cut themselves off from the Lord of heaven and have forfeited all rights to His love and favor. It would have been perfectly just for God to have left all men in their sin and misery and to have shown mercy to none. **GOD WAS UNDER NO OBLIGATION WHATSOEVER TO PROVIDE SALVATION TO ANYONE.**

Those who were not chosen to salvation were passed by and left to their own devices. Man has not the right to call God's justice into question for not choosing every one to salvation (Romans 9:14-24). Knowing of the goodness and mercy of God we are obligated to accept God's revelation of Himself and His work as it is presented to us in His word, and knowing that He is infinitely good, refuse to foolishly charge Him with being wicked and unjust. This is the very height of sin, and the foolish accusations against the goodness of God in His work of election are motivated by the God-hating Satan.

Why did God elect His people unto Himself? His choice of particular sinners unto salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or goodness or willingness on the part of the elected ones (Romans 9:11). God's choice was based entirely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will (Ephesians 1:5,11). Election, then was not determined upon anything that man would do, will, or think, but resulted entirely from the purpose of God. Remember that this same principle held true in God's election of men to certain offices and works; it also held true concerning God's choice of certain nations to particular works and destinies (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). God did not choose Israel to be His special covenant people because she had some good to merit God's choice. God does His choosing in all

phases of election according to the good pleasure of His will. God's choice was not based on man's goodness, works, faith, holiness, not even on his faithfulness to the gospel.

In a paragraph or two following, some popular and wide-spread objections to the doctrine must be considered. This is necessary because the truth must be defended. But right now, it would be good to look at this doctrine from a positive standpoint. This is the way election should be looked at, not as a harsh doctrine to be dreaded, but as a beautiful truth to be cherished and loved. And it is beautiful when it is considered that there are no spiritual blessings apart from election. If you have enjoyed spiritual blessings it is because you are one of God's elect. Do you enjoy praying, singing praises to God, reading His Holy Word, hearing and rejoicing in the blessed Gospel of Christ, living an honorable life that God may be glorified thereby? If the answer is "yes", THEN YOU ARE ONE OF GOD'S ELECT. You are bound for heaven because God loved you before the world began (I Thess. 1:4). The apostle Paul broke forth into jubilant song when he began to write about all the blessings that stem from election. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Thus all blessings stem from election and it is a beautiful doctrine to rejoice in.

In view of the beauty of this doctrine and of the comfort to be derived from it, it is, at first glance, somewhat difficult to understand why such wrath and opposition has been directed against it. Even when Christ preached this doctrine, Himself, as He did so beautifully in John 6, some of His own disciples called it a "Hard Saying" (John 6:60). The truth is that Satan hates this doctrine with a passion, because it gives all the honor and glory to God for salvation, and each of us, even the elect, still have a sinful nature which we will have to contend with till death (Romans 7:15-25). This sinful nature wants to have a little glory of its own. Our sinful nature is plagued by pride. We like to think that there was at least a little something good or beautiful in us that caused God to love us. Our pride strives to prevent us from admitting that in ourselves we are completely helpless and unless a sovereign God had loved us when we were unlovable and chosen us in Christ, we would have gone into everlasting damnation. In heaven the triune God will get all the credit for salvation. Here man wants a part of it. The way some men discount the power of God in election, they seem to think the song they will be singing in heaven will be somewhat as follows: "Praise God for His work of election! Praise the Son for His work of redemption! Praise the Spirit for His work of regeneration! Praise the missionary board for sending the preacher to me! Praise the preacher for coming and preaching the gospel to me! Praise me for receiving the gospel and thereby becoming saved!" You can readily see that here the work of the preacher or the sinner is fully as important as the works of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No matter where the breakdown occurs, salvation is thwarted if one of the above parties fails to do his part. But, praise God, salvation is not left up to man. It is the work of God, Who makes no mistakes, and will have ALL the praise! There won't be any songs like the above sung in heaven. The so-called "soul-winners" will have to give way before the God of Heaven. The heavenly chorus will give all the praise to the one who actually wrought salvation. "Any they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the

seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation . . ." (Revelation 4:9).

SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

What are some of those objections that are raised against the glorious teachings of God's election? First, and most horrible, there are some objections that contain charges against God Himself. These objections are not new, They have been raised as long as the doctrine has been preached and taught: even when it was taught by Christ and the apostles. There are two of these types of objections found in Romans 9. It would be well to examine these and observe the Apostle Paul's inspired answer to them. Our answer today can be nothing but the same answer of inspiration.

OBJECTION:

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" (Romans 9:14).

INSPIRED ANSWER:

"God forbid". Our answer must be the same today if the foolish and sinful objection is raised that God is unfair because He chose some to salvation and left others out. The God of heaven and earth, Who has revealed Himself to us in many ways is incapable of committing wrong. The reasons He has given us in His word should be sufficient for us. Speculation on any further reasons is futile and sinful. Trying to limit God's actions to our own notions of what we think would be right or wrong for Him to do is the very height of unenlightened presumption. What are the reasons God has given us for His work of election?

1. "That He might make known the riches of His glory. . ." (Romans 9:23).
2. It is "according to the good pleasure of His will. . ." (Ephesians 1:5).
3. "To the praise of the glory of His grace. . ." (Eph.1:6).

We cannot go beyond these answers that are revealed in Scripture. If there are still questions that are unanswered to us we must bow in humility before the truth of Scripture.

OBJECTION:

If election is true then "Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" (Romans 9:19).

THE ANSWER FROM SCRIPTURE:

"Nay but, O man who art thou that repliest against God. Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?"

OBJECTION:

Another objection that is commonly raised against the doctrine of election is that it is fatalistic. It leads men to be careless sinners. A man may say, "If I'm not one of the elect, I'm going to hell no matter what kind of life I live, so eat, drink, sin, and be merry".

ANSWER:

This is a very old objection. It is at least as old as Paul's time (Romans 6:1-2). How is this objection to be answered? Simply this - if a man has the above attitude, there is no evidence that he is one of God's elect. God's elect have an inborn spiritual life that prompts them to bring forth fruits of righteousness that God's name may be honored by their lives (Matt. 7:15; 12:33). There have been many of God's elect who, far from having the above sinful attitude, have given their lives as martyrs in the service of their Lord. A licentious person has no grounds for claiming that he is one of God's elect. Election does not lead to sinfulness of life. On the contrary, the child of God is continually seeking to "make His calling and election sure" unto himself and to others (II Peter 1:10). One of God's elect will be grief-stricken when he falls into sin, will seek repentance and God's forgiveness.

SOME PERVERSIONS OF THE DOCTRINE

Having shown what election is, it will now be necessary to briefly show what election is not. This is necessary because many who must freely admit that the doctrine of election is abundantly taught in the Bible, seek to pervert it and attempt to dilute it.

One perversion of this doctrine is that God elected or chose only the Jews and that was only as His representative nation on earth. It has already been pointed out that God did choose the Jews or the nation of Israel for a specific purpose. This was His national election or choice of Israel to perform certain functions. But this national election was not the election of God's chosen ones to salvation. The Jews were chosen to deliver to the world the law, the prophets, the priesthood, etc., but they were not all chosen for salvation (John 8:39-44). It is a very simple matter to demonstrate that election unto salvation pertained to Gentiles as well as Jews. Paul, a Jew, in writing to the church composed mostly of Gentiles at Ephesus states that "God has blessed us (Jew and Gentile) according as He hath chosen (elected) us (Jew and Gentile) in Him before the foundation of the world, that we (Jew and Gentile) should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Eph. 1:3,4). The whole epistle abounds with the words we and us. A Jewish writer and mostly Gentile readers, both chosen and predestinated.

Another perversion of the doctrine of election is that God chose only the apostles. When Christ mentions His own in John 17, He speaks of the apostles. Election then, it is affirmed, is only God's choice of the apostles, and nothing more than this. It has again, already been pointed out that God did elect or choose the apostles and other men as well, to fill certain offices or to do particular work, but this election is not the election of all God's people to salvation. It is easy to show that there is a lot more to election than merely pertains to the apostles. Peter shows this plainly in his first epistle: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . ." (I Peter 1:1,2). Peter covers a broad region and states that there are those of the elect scattered throughout this region. To scatter the eleven remaining apostles over such an area would be to scatter them mighty thin indeed. Certainly eleven men could not be scattered

throughout such an area. Peter also states that these elect are strangers. The Apostles were not strangers to Peter. They had lived and labored together and were intimately acquainted. So, this perversion of the doctrine of election is just another vain philosophy of men.

Finally, one more corruption of this precious doctrine must be answered. Some teach erroneously that election was based on a foreknowledge by God of some good in men or on a foreknowledge that some men would accept Christ and these would be the elect. This interpretation not only contradicts the idea of sovereignty, but ignores the basic meaning of the word foreknow in Scripture when it pertains to election. In the first place, if this interpretation were correct, then God would not be electing anyone. He would merely be ratifying the choice of the sinner. There is a great deal of difference between election and ratification. In the second place, when the word foreknow is used in Scripture pertaining to election it does not mean mere knowledge beforehand but carries with it the idea of regard with favor. This is easily seen in Romans 8:29; 11:2. Romans 8:29 does not say that "those whom God foreknew SOMETHING ABOUT, He predestinated." It says "WHOM He did foreknow." God foreknew people here, not things about people. The same is true in Romans 11:2. When the Bible speaks of God knowing particular individuals, it often means that they are objects of His special regard and concern. In Amos 3:2, God, speaking to Israel says, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, . . ." The Lord knew about all the families of the earth, but He knew Israel in a special way. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus says to some men, "And then will I profess unto them, I never KNEW you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity." It is certain that Christ knew ALL ABOUT these evil men, but He never knew them as the objects of His favor and love. While it is certain that God had a prior knowledge of man's actions, it does not follow that any such actions were to be the basis of God's choice of them.

CONCLUSION

In summary, election in the Bible is the unconditional choice of individuals. The choice was based on God's love and purpose, not merit; neither merit potential nor merit foreseen. Election was the act of a sovereign God who cannot be halted or even questioned. This doctrine is the central truth of all the Scriptures. It is present in every passage, implied or pre-supposed in every part. To deny this truth is to make of God a helpless God, dependent upon the will of man, able to work only after man has made his decisions. GOD FORBID. Let us rejoice in the God of Scripture, the Almighty one to Whom all the praise, honor, and glory is due forever! THAT GOD IS THE ELECTING GOD.

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