

Divine Election

The most difficult truth for the natural mind to accept regarding God is the doctrine of divine election. The absolute sovereignty of God is offensive to human the human heart. The idea that God orders and controls everything is simply not acceptable to man. Most of all the human heart hates the notion that salvation is entirely God's work. In fact, the word "elect" has all but been removed from the vocabulary of the modern church. However, as Scripture proves, the normal vocabulary of the New Testament writers included the title of "the elect". In their minds, there was no shame in the idea of God's providential control over eternal life. The fact remains that if God chose some before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), then believers deserve no credit for receiving Christ as their Savior.

It must be noted that Scripture clearly affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. All good theology has tension. We must accept both sides of the truth, through we may not understand how they correspond to one another. Somewhere in eternity gathering up the past and the future, the two cross and make absolute sense in the mind of God. However, the church (with fallible minds) has always found it difficult to stay balanced on difficult or complicated doctrines. The doctrine of election must be approached honestly and completely. It is important that God's people approach this doctrine with caution and thoroughness. If one approaches Scripture without preconceived notions and human bias, then the conclusion will be that God is sovereign over everything, including salvation. Even faith is God's gracious gift to His elect. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father" (John 6:65). "Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son will to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Because God is in the drivers seat, the one who receives Christ as personal Savior has nothing to boast about (Eph. 2:8-9).

The doctrine of election is taught throughout the entire Bible. For example, Israel was elected as God's chosen people (Deut 7:6; Is. 45:5). Great men of the Old Testament were divinely chosen by God such as: Isaac (Gen. 21:12; Abraham, (Neh. 9:7), Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:23). The New Testament also testifies to God's sovereign choosing: Jesus Himself was the elect of the Father (Is. 42:1; 1 Pet. 2:6), the apostles (Jn. 13:18), Jacob (Rom. 9:12-13), Rufus (Rom. 16:13), and Paul (Gal. 1:15). We find that all believers are "chosen of God" (Titus 1:1). Believers were "predestined according to His purpose who works out all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). He chose the church before the foundation of the world....He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (Eph. 1:4-5). Believers "are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son... and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-29).

Scripture claims that God has "foreknowledge" for certain people. Peter wrote in (1 Pet. 1:1-2) that believers are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." The word "foreknowledge" has a more specific meaning than simply to be aware. Peter was NOT saying that God simply knew who would believe and therefore chose them because of their foreseen faith. This is a tragic interpretation because it strips God of His rightful sovereignty and makes Him a servant to man's choices. In this view, man becomes the author of salvation and not God. Peter's intention was to show that God has determined before time to know, love, and save those He foreknew. Peter point

is that God chose those whom He foreknew without regard for ANYTHING good or bad they might do.

Scripture teaches without shame or compromise that God's sovereign choice is made "according to the kind intention of His will" and "according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." This is beyond our uninspired minds. God makes all decisions with absolute perfection, omniscience, and justice. To question God's decisions is to blaspheme His character. He makes all decisions without any counsel or reason external to Himself. God did not chose anyone because they were more worthy than others or that there is something praiseworthy in them or that He foresaw that they would believe in Him. His decision to save some is SOLELY BECAUSE IT PLEASES HIM to do so. God declares "the end from the beginning...saying, "My purposes will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Is. 46:10). The Almighty God is not subject to what we feel is fair or what we think. He will never relinquish His eternal decrees to the decisions of man. His purposes for choosing some and rejecting others are hidden in the secret counsels of His own will.

To go beyond the issue of salvation, we know everything that exists in the entire universe exists because God chose it to exist. God allowed it, decreed it, and called it into existence. "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3). "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps" (Ps. 135:6). He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 8:6 that "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

When we consider God's absoluteness, our thoughts are most likely directed to the problem of sin. First we must come to grips that God is not the originator or author of sin. Therefore, putting the two together, we know that although God isn't sin's author, He did and does allow it. As hard as it is for us to justify, God uses it as an integral part of His plan. In His eternal plan, He has a purpose for allowing it. It may appear that Adam and Eve were caught off guard by Satan's crafty deception, but God wasn't. Satan isn't some cosmic power that's beyond God's sovereign control. Scripture for the most part is silent in regards to God's purposes in allowing sin. He do know that one primary purpose is to display His glory. The brilliance of His perfections can be seen best against the backdrop of evil and wickedness. Could we know the depth of His unconditional love if were capable of self-salvation.

Contrary to popular opinion, God uses, controls, and even directs evil to accomplish good (Gen. 45:7-8; 50:20; Rom. 8:28). Joseph in all his mistreatment by his brothers made a startling confession "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, FOR GOD sent me before you to preserve life (Gen. 45:5). In verse 7 Joseph told his hateful, jealous brothers "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Notice what he said in verse 8, "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, BUT GOD. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph acknowledges that God's sovereign purposes in using and directing evil "As for you, you meant it for evil against me, BUT GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." God is not only on the back end of evil, but on the front end as well. That is the only way that Romans 8:28 can be true as Paul claims "God works everything for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." We must

confess under the surrender of an omniscient God, that we do not understand this completely. However, it does teach that God is utterly beyond question as the perfect, sovereign, holy, and absolute just God.

The idea that God sovereignly chooses who will be saved is now where clearer than the in ninth chapter of Romans. Paul tells his readers that God chose Jacob over his twin brother Esau “though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls” (v. 11). Paul unashamedly proclaims the sovereignty in verse 15-16 when he says to Moses “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

The difficulty in accepting this doctrine today is no different than in Paul’s time. Paul knew his audience would find it difficult to swallow. In anticipation of his audience’s response, Paul asks the question “You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will (v19)? In asking this question, Paul was verbalizing the thoughts of his audience. He was anticipating the same reaction that we hear today, namely, “If God has already determined who will be saved, then what man does makes no difference”. Paul’s response is interesting. We would expect an answer. But he gives is something unexpected. Instead of offering a deep theological insight, he simply reprimands the skeptic: “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another common use?” (vv. 20-21). This response has striking similarities with the rebuke God gave job when He questioned His ways in chapters 38-41.

As mentioned earlier, we must be careful to stay balanced on this important doctrine. We must acknowledge that Scripture affirms both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Even though these seem mutually exclusive, they do correspond to each other under the supervision of God’s will (Eph. 1:11). How both of these realities can be true simultaneously cannot be understood by the human mind, only by God (Isa. 55:8-9).

In spite of the difficulty, Scripture declares God’s sovereign work in the elect, however, it is also clear that people are held responsible to believe the gospel. Each individual is responsible to accept what ever light they have been given (Rom. 2:19-20), so that eternal judgment is just if they reject the light. Those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior, do so voluntarily. Jesus was greatly grieved (John 5:40) “You are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.” Jesus also told unbelievers in John 8:24, “Unless you believe that I am [God], you shall die in your sins.” In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, he combined divine sovereignty and human responsibility when he said “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.” And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:37-40). Peter clearly believed that the gospel is for everyone, yet only for those whom the “Lord our God shall call to Himself.” In John 6, our Lord Himself combined both divine sovereignty and human responsibility when He said, “ All that the Father give Me shall come to Me, and

the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.” (v.37); “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life” (v.40); “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (v. 44); “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (v. 47); and , “No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father” (v. 65).

We must be careful to conclude, that God is unjust because He chooses to save some and not others. The ultimate test of our submission to a sovereign, omniscient, and loving God is to accept revelation that is beyond our ability to reconcile. God can never be measured by humanly determined standards. It is sinful for man, a fallen piece of clay, to claim that he can reinterpret God’s fairness. It’s utterly blasphemous to assume man has a higher standard of what is right than an infinite, holy, and perfect God. Even the arrogance of our arrogance is known by God in Psalm 50:21 when God says, “You thought that I was just like you.” The only solution is not human reason, but divine revelation.