

Election and Predestination

Introduction:

There has hardly been a greater battlefield in Christian theology than over the issue of election and predestination. It has divided Christians since the days of Augustine and Pelagius; it has divided churches and denominations since the Reformation; it has even divided countries.

These are sensitive doctrines among many Baptists. In Great Britain, the “Baptist Union” of 1891 was a union of General (Arminian) Baptists and Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists — two groups which are divergent on these issues.

A great deal of the damage to the cause of Jesus Christ has been done through the man-made philosophy of Calvinism, especially in the area of missions and soul-winning. When William Carey presented his burning desire to take the gospel to the heathen, he was told, “Young man, sit down, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He’ll do it without consulting you or me.”

I. The Doctrine of Election

A. The Meaning of Election

The words ‘election,’ or ‘elect,’ mean “chosen,” “choose,” “called,” or “to call.”

B. The Biblical Usage of the word “Election”

The Biblical usage of the word “election” and its associated words gives the correct definition. (This is not likely to be the theological definition used by many.)

The Bible uses these terms in several ways:

1. In the “Corporate” Sense.

Corporate election is that which relates to a body of people.

a) Of the Nation of Israel

Many Scriptures refer to the nation of Israel as “God’s elect,” or “God’s chosen people.”

Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-8; Isaiah 45:4; 65:9, 22; Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; II Timothy 2:10

It is interesting to note that according to Romans 11:28, salvation through the gospel and election are two different things!

b) Of the Host of Angels

I Timothy 5:21

c) Of the Kingdom of God

I Peter 2:9, 10

2. In the “Personal” Sense

God also chooses individuals

a) The Lord Jesus Christ

Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:18; I Peter 2:6

b) The Believer

Romans 8:33; I Corinthians 1:26-28; Colossians 3:12; James 2:5; I Thessalonians 1:4; I Peter 1:2; Revelation 17:14

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- c) Various Individuals — For Service.
 - (1) Moses — Psalm 106:23
 - (2) Levites — Deuteronomy 18:5; II Chronicles 29:11
 - (3) Judah -- Psalm 78:67-68
 - (4) Saul — I Samuel 10:24
 - (5) David — II Samuel 6:21; II Chronicles 6:6; Psalm 78:70
 - (6) Apostles — John 6:70; 13:18
 - (7) Disciples — John 15:16, 19
 - (8) Paul — Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:15
 - (9) Pastors and Missionaries — Acts 13:2
- d) Various Places
 - E.g. Jerusalem — II Chronicles 6:6

C. The Basis of God's Election

1. God's Foreknowledge.

Election is according to the foreknowledge of God — I Peter 1:2.

Because God is omniscient, He knows from eternity past what will come to pass. He knew all who would trust His Son for salvation. He knew what Israel would do before He called them as a special nation.

The term, “elect according to the foreknowledge of God” should be cross referenced with Ephesians 1:4 — “He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

The Bible also teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ was “slain from [before] the foundation of the world” — I Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8. What all this means is, that He would send His Son in the world to die for sinners, and He foreknew who would trust Christ for salvation. In the infinite mind of God, before the world was even called into existence, His Son was already crucified, the plan of salvation was already in place, Titus 1:2 — and believers were already in Christ, saved!

Yet, God's foreknowledge does not arrive at a fatalistic concept of things or negate free-will — the Lord Jesus Christ willingly laid down His life, John 10:18; Matthew 26:53 — and man too must choose to accept or reject Christ as Saviour.

Since God knew in eternity past that I would trust His Son, He chose me as one of His own at that time. (Why wait?)

2. God's Calling

The expression, “for many are called but few are chosen,” is found in Matthew 20:16 and Matthew 22:14.

- a) The context of Matthew 20:16 is a parable of service — not salvation.
- b) The content of Matthew 22:14 is a parable of salvation — not service.

In each case we clearly note that the “call” was issued to all, but was effective only to those who accepted the invitation.

This is a vital point to note — God's call to salvation is universal — Acts 2:39; I Corinthians 1:24.

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(By the same token, God's call to the work is issued to all Christians.)

3. God's Grace

Just as Israel had no claim to become God's chosen people — Deuteronomy 7:6-8 — so we as Christians have no claim or merit of our own to become God's people, I Peter 2:9-10

Note: Ephesians 2:8-9

The 'gift of God' is not faith, but salvation. Eternal life of God's gift — Romans 6:23 — and it cannot be earned. Faith is not a meritorious work of man.

"The free act of God in bestowing salvation is grace: the free act of man in accepting it is faith." (Gladden)

D. The Manner of God's Election

We acknowledge the sovereignty of God in election. That is, God will choose who He alone chooses, without any outside or mitigating circumstances. This fact is evident to the example of God choosing Israel in Romans 9. See: verses 11-18.

When God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," that is His prerogative.

What this does not mean in the matter salvation is that God chooses between individuals. God wishes to save all men — I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9. Christ died for all men — John 3:16.

What this does mean in the matter of salvation is that He has chosen to save all who put their faith and trust in His Son.

Consider some of the proof texts offered to support the concept that God chooses between individuals in the matter of salvation:

1. II Thessalonians 2:13

The phrase, "chosen you to salvation" has often been used to teach that God chooses between individuals. However, the context of this verse shows God is addressing believers only, and is contrasting the 'end of the way' for unbelievers (verse 12), and believers (verse 14b). This passage explains how a man is "chosen" to salvation — through the Spirit, the truth, and the Gospel. The fact is all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are chosen unto salvation.

2. Romans 9

This chapter has long been a favorite of those who believe God chooses between individuals in the matter of salvation. However, note the following:

a) The Chapter Concerns Itself with Israel as a Nation

It is an enlargement of what John the Baptist preached in Matthew 3:9-10.

b) The Chapter Begins a New section in the Book of Romans.

It deals with the setting aside of Israel nationally (not individually).by God, and His turning to the Gentiles.

Romans 11 concludes this section, and Romans 11:28 clearly demonstrates election apart from salvation.

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- c) If applied to Salvation, this chapter teaches:
- (1) That God saves whom He will — I.e. all who trust Christ — vs. 15
 - (2) That Salvation is not of Nationality — vs. 6-11.
 - (3) That Salvation is not of the Will of the Flesh — vs. 16.
 - (4) That Salvation is not of the Will of Man — vs. 12
The will of man would dictate that Esau be the heir. God said otherwise.
If this were applied to salvation, it would simply teach that our eternal destiny is not based upon human merit.
- d) Pharaoh was not Predestined to Hell by God's choosing.
See: vs. 17-18

At this point of time, Pharaoh had already rejected God — Exodus 1:22; 5:2 — and verse 22 tells us he had been the subject of God's long-suffering.

The fact is, Pharaoh first hardened his heart before God hardened it — Exodus 7:3.

II. The Doctrine of Predestination

The general misunderstanding about predestination arises from confusion about the time of predestination. The teaching of Calvinism identifies predestination with the natural birth — the Word of God identifies it with the spiritual birth.

Here then is the understanding — predestination does not apply to the lost, but to the saved! Man is NOT predestined to be saved — rather, the believer is predestined to receive the benefits of salvation.

A. John 1:12

Note the order: We receive Christ — we are given sonship.

B. Ephesians 1:5

We are not predestined to salvation, but to sonship.

C. Ephesians 1:11

Every believer is predestined to an inheritance — I Peter 1:4

D. Romans 8:29

We are not predestined to be saved. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ.

None of these Scriptures even hint of the fact that God has predetermined who can and who cannot be saved. What they do tell us is that before the foundation of the world God in His divine counsel determined that all who would accept Christ as Saviour would receive the benefits of salvation.

(God could have predestined all who would believe of His Son to turn into angels — but He chose otherwise.)

For example, consider Solomon. Upon taking his first gasp of God's air he is predestined to become the king of Israel — I Chronicles 22:9-10; 29:1. Solomon was a prince for many years. He was not the King — but he would be one day. In the meantime, he enjoyed many privileges of his position, such as wealth, title, and great respect.

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When we are born into God's family, we are immediately predestined to many glorious things. Some things we immediately enjoy, such as forgiveness, peace, co-suffering with Christ, justification, etc. We are also predestined to some thing we have yet to receive, such as our heavenly mansion, our glorification, etc.

It is the Christian who has been predestined. In this light, we may also safely conclude that one who remains in unbelief and Christ-refection is predestined to spend eternity in a sinner's hell.

III. The Error of Calvinism

Calvinism is a religious philosophy (Colossians 2:8) which emphasizes the sovereignty of God, and which in doing so argues that in salvation it would be unthinkable and impossible for sovereign God to be frustrated by the stubborn will of a finite creature.

The outcome of this logic is the teaching or implication that some men are predestined to be saved, others are predestined to be lost. This is a wicked and unscriptural teaching.

A. The Definition of Calvinism

In the area of salvation, Calvinism has been summarized by the "Five Points" — usually expressed by the acrostic, 'TULIP.'

- T — Total Depravity
- U — Unconditional Election
- L — Limited Atonement
- I — Irresistible Grace
- P — Perseverance of the Saints

1. The Meaning of "Total Depravity."

Calvinism teaches that the unsaved man is in such bondage to Satan that he has absolutely no free will, and is completely incapable of responding to God. In other words, a sinner cannot repent unless God overpowers him. Scriptural admonitions calling on man to repent and turn to the Lord (e.g. Isaiah 1:18; 45:22; 55:6; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 1:15; Acts 17:30; etc.) when in fact he cannot, make the Lord to be a taunting and mocking God.

2. The Meaning of "Unconditional Election."

This is the teaching that, because man is incapable of coming to Christ, God sovereignly acts in man's behalf, opening his heart and granting him repentance and faith. A man is chosen to be saved without reference to his 'want to,' and will be saved regardless of his will or actions.

In Ephesians 2:8, salvation (not faith) is the gift of God. That is a grammatical fact.

3. The Meaning of "Limited Atonement."

Calvinism holds that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ was only for the elect — not all men.

4. The Meaning of "Irresistible Grace."

This is the teaching that a man will be saved regardless — if he is one of God's elect. If God has predestined a soul to be saved, he will be saved.

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Not, however, Matthew 23:37 — “ye would not,” not, “ye could not!” See also John 5:40

The answer of the Word of God to this teaching is “whosoever will” — Revelation 2:17. Note also Acts 7:51. Men can (and do) resist and reject the grace of god — Proverbs 1:24-25.

Calvinists cite certain proof texts for this position. For example:

a) John 6:37-47

This passage has been used to teach irresistible grace:

- verse 37 — “All that the Father giveth me shall come...”

- Verse 40 declares: “...every one which seeth the Son, and believeth...”

To this we must observe:

(1) Verse 37 goes on to say: “...and him that cometh...”

(2) Verse 40 declares: “...every one which seeth the Son, and believeth...”

(3) How does God draw men? Answer: John 12:32.

Compare this Scripture with John 3:14-16 and Galatians 3:1.

b) Philippians 2:12-13

Some see the doctrine of irresistible grace in the words: “...it is God which worketh in you both to will and do of his good pleasure.”

The obvious reply to that is that the passage is not addressed to a lost man, but to one already saved — Hebrews 13:21.

5. The Meaning of the “Perseverance of the Saints.”

Calvinism holds that the elect will, by nature of their salvation, persevere to the end, and that the identifying mark of one who has been predestined to be saved is his perseverance in the things of God.

It is important to note that perseverances is not the same as preservation. Perseverance is a human work — preservation (eternal security) is a divine work. Again, the Calvinist logic is perverted: the only assurance a Calvinist has of his salvation is that he is one of the elect: the only way he can know if he is one of the elect is by his persevering in holiness! This quickly leads to work-salvation — not in theory, but certainly in practice!

Most Calvinists believe that man who professes to be a Christian yet does not live a life of holiness and obedience to Christ cannot, in fact, be truly one of God’s elect. This is the essence of Lordship Salvation — the teaching that “the signature of saving faith is surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ.”

Lordship Salvation denies the realities of Scriptures such as Matthew 26:56; John 6:66; I Corinthians 3:1; and I Timothy 1:6, 19; 5:8; 6:10; etc., and comes close to a doctrine of having to actually maintain one’s salvation by works. It fails to distinguish between salvation and discipleship. Salvation is through believing — Romans 1:16; 4:5; discipleship is through submission to the Lordship of Christ — Luke 14:26, 27, 33; John 13:13, 17; 14:15.

B. The Dangers of Calvinism

John Calvin (1509-1564 A.D.) was no friend of Baptists — his doctrines of salvation are also no friend of the Bible-believing Baptists. It is one of the most deadening teachings

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in existence, and the student is warned to be very wary of the terminology and teachings of this philosophy.

There are seven major dangers with Calvinism:

1. Calvinism Destroys Missionary and Soul Winning Endeavors.

This is the logical outcome of Calvinism. If the destiny of all souls had been pre-determined, why bother with all the expense and effort of trying to win the unsaved? If 'unconditional election' guarantees the salvation of all those predestined to be saved, what difference does it make if we speak to men about Christ or not? Furthermore, since we have no way of knowing which men are the elect, we can never say assuredly to anyone, "Christ died for you" — since He may not have; neither should we declare carte blanche, "God loves you!".

Another outcome of this kind of reasoning is that since it is impossible that item salvation of the elect should fail to come to pass, then the means to that end (missionaries, evangelists, soul winners, etc.) is also irresistible. Thus there can never be a shortage of missionaries or soul winners, and a Christians who never attempts to win a soul to Christ can say, "No one is going to miss Heaven because I did not witness."

Thus Calvinism not only ruins evangelism but relieves the Christians of any responsibility.

The Bible instructs the Lord's churches and individual believers who make up those churches to preach the Gospel to "every creature." — Mark 16:15. Thus Calvinism misses God's supreme purpose in history.

2. Calvinism Wrests the Scriptures

The doctrines of Calvinism begin with a philosophical position, and force the Scriptures to fit. The reverse is what should take place. It is highly dangerous to base any doctrine upon selected texts rather than inductive Bible study.

Calvinistic philosophy neglects the teaching of "whosoever will" — rejecting it as a work which negates all that God has done. This thinking results from confusing the means (personal faith in Christ) with the ground (the gracious work of Christ) of salvation.

3. Calvinism Easily leads to Extreme and Other Heresy.

- a) Most Calvinists also embrace "Covenant Theology" — that basis of Amillennialism and infant "baptism."
- b) The so-called "Hard Shell" anti-missionary 'Baptists' are hyper-Calvinists.
- c) The Calvinistic concept of perseverance accommodates the notion of salvation being a process rather than an instantaneous event, because it usually takes considerable time for someone to live up to God's expectations of holiness.

4. Calvinism is a Doctrine which Promotes Spiritual Pride.

Being one of the "elect" — chosen of God to be saved — is an elitist doctrine.

Calvinism has a strong appeal to the scholarly intellect, and its adherents are often men of high degree.

The doctrine of Lordship Salvation produces a dangerous judgmental spirit. Those whose lives do not 'measure up' are often written off as unsaved.

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5. Calvinism Slights the Character of God.

No Calvinist can answer the questions, “Why did God chose unconditionally from among the mass of humanity only the elect? Why did God elect less than all? What is the reason for Him doing so, since the Bible gives no information about it?”

The usual response is that God has both a revealed will and a secret will. When asked how we know God has these secret wise and holy reasons, the answer come back, “Because He wouldn’t act as He did if He didn’t have them.” This is circular reasoning.

Calvinists usually affirm that God would have all men to be saved, and that He stretches out His hand to all — but then turn around and say He has a hidden purpose which is contrary to this, the actual result being that He is leading only some to Himself. One Calvinist put it this way: “Whosoever will, may come; Whosoever may, will come; and Whosoever will not, cannot come!?!”

A. W. Pink said, “The Holy Spirit does something more in each of God’s elect than He does in the non-elect.”

This makes God to be a hypocrite and a respecter of persons!

When God sovereignly chooses to save a wicked sinner, yet (by virtue of His “non-election”) consigns an equally wicked sinner to hell, He is patently unfair — infinitely and eternally worse than a father who plays favorites with his children.

Calvinism also calls into question God’s love for the world. His love, is in contended, is not general and indiscriminate — directed to all men, bu peculiar to His ‘elect.’

Calvinism logically concludes that God hates sinners. To this kind of thinking, John 3:16 must read: “For God so loved the elect...”

6. Calvinism Makes God to be the Author of Sin.

Sin originated, under God’s permissive will, in the free action of man. The logic of Calvinistic philosophy — absolute determinism — makes God the efficient cause of sin in the universe. Calvinists believe that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, thus He foreordained the fall of man through Adam, which therefore was in a certain sense necessary! This is exactly what Adam and Eve attempted in the Garden — to throw the blame for their sin on other, including God!

There is something terribly wrong with an understand of the ‘Sovereignty of God’ which makes Him to be the cause of sin.

7. Calvinism Undermines Human Responsibility.

Any denial of the ‘free will’ of man is a denial of human responsibility. If man is not a free moral agent, then he cannot be held responsible for his sins. Calvinism appeals to the natural man — usually the very religious natural man.

Again, we are warned of the dangers of this man-made philosophy which appeals to the selected Scriptures. A true Calvinist often uses a lot of double-

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talk to escape the reality of conclusions to his logic, and most Calvinists are adept at using 'great willing' theological terms to overcome the Bible believer.

IV. The Doctrine of Free-Will.

In the matter of salvation, the Scriptures teach that man has a free will to choose or reject Christ.

A. God's Will

1. It is God's will that all men would be saved.
Matthew 18:14; I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9
2. It is God's intent that all men would be saved.
Romans 5:18; I Timothy 2:6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Revelation 21:6
3. It is God's command that all men be saved.
Matthew 7:21; Acts 17:30; I John 3:23
4. It is God's invitation to all men to be saved.
Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17
5. It is God's desire for all men to be saved.
Ezekiel 18:31-32; 33:11

B. Man's Will

Man has a free will to choose — Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 1:29; Hebrews 11:24-25.

With God's free offer of salvation, man must choose whether to:

1. Receive or not receive
John 1:11-12
2. Believe or not believe
John 3:16,36; Acts 8:37 and Romans 4:24; 10:9-10
3. To call or not to call
Romans 10:13
4. To obey or not to obey
Romans 10:16; Proverbs 1:24

C. Whosoever Will

The terms "whosoever" and "whoso" are Biblical terms which are defined as 'any one without exception.'

The word "whosoever" is surely the sweetest word in the English language (outside of the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ) to every convicted sinner.

The Gospel of God's grace through Christ is freely offered to whosoever — Joel 2:32; John 3:15-16; 4:13-14; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 2:21; 10:43; Romans 10:13; I John 4:15; 5:1 Revelation 22:17.

Salvation is of the Lord — John 2:9. It is entirely of grace. There is no human work or merit involved. It is through Christ, and Christ alone. Therefore man's choice to receive

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Christ is a response to God's gracious invitation, not a "work of righteousness" to obtain salvation.

V. The Error of Arminianism

Arminianism was born out of opposition to Calvinism at the beginning of the 17th Century. The movement was led by the Dutch theologian Jacobus Aminius (1560-1609), himself a former strict Calvinist.

Arminianism teaches that the guilt of Adam's sin was not passed on to succeeding generations, although the effect of it was.

This makes sin to be a disease, or an inherent weakness in man.

Through the preaching of the Word of God a universal grace is bestowed upon man which exerts a moral influence on his understanding and will. If the hearer assents to the Truth, he then receives a greater measure of God's grace, is subsequently justified because of his faith, and if he perseveres to the end becomes partaker of eternal life.

Ultimately the Arminian believe one can loose his salvation.

A. Methodism

The Methodist movement developed a form of Arminianism which rejected these distinct stages in the process of salvation, instead teaching an instantaneous conversion experience with a second radical change (sanctification) following.

B. Falling from Grace

Perhaps the most obnoxious feature to Arminianism is the teaching a man may choose to turn away from Christ and back into a life of sin.

Salvation can be lost, and must be maintained by "persevering to the end." Salvation is thus seen as a 'probation.'