

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

INTRO: The doctrine of salvation is a very involved doctrine, including within it many specialized doctrines. Let me give you some of those; justification, sanctification, vocation, regeneration, adoption, conversion and more. Among those are two other very important doctrines that have caused a lot of debate among Christians and those are the doctrines of election and predestination.

I am only giving one message on each of these two doctrines which means I have to reduce a lot of material to its main core and that is what I will be doing with the doctrine of election this morning. The key thought in this doctrine is that of 'choosing': how and why did God choose certain individuals to salvation? Or how did He choose the majority to damnation, that they would go to hell, that they would be reprobated?

In election two opposing views have come to be held by Christians. One is election based on God's foreknowledge. This view says man has a free will and that God chose such as would obey Him based on His foreknowledge that they would do so. The other view is election based on predeterminism. God chose certain people to salvation not based entirely on His choice, and that choice has nothing to do with the choice of those He chose. It is my view that no believer has fully matured who has not wrestled with this doctrine. Every believer should give careful thought to this great doctrine sometime in his or her earthly pilgrimage.

So our subject matter is, how does God choose certain individuals to salvation? I challenge every listener to these three great rules of good Bible interpretation. As much as lies within you be open, be honest and be objective with the Word of God.

I. DEFINITION OF ELECTION

Let us begin by looking at the original word that expresses this doctrine. The original word is *eklogēe*, which comes from *eklegomai*, to select or make a choice. Here then, is my definition of the doctrine of election: **Election is God's choice of**

those individuals who will be saved. As we have said already, two views have developed and we want to consider those.

II. TWO VIEWS OF ELECTION

A. Election Based On Predeterminism

We begin then, by the view that God chose certain individuals to be saved by His own sovereign predeterminism. This means that God's choice of certain individuals to salvation has absolutely nothing to do with any choice or action by the individual. The key issue here is, does man have a free will? Well, as I see it, those who hold this view would say that man has a free will, but it is God who decides whether they will choose hell or heaven, if such is possible.

Let me read a definition for election for this view from Strong's Systematic Theology. He says, "Election is that eternal act of God, by which in his sovereign pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, he chose certain out of the number of sinful men to be the recipients of the special grace of his Spirit, so to be made voluntary partakers of Christ's salvation." In dealing with the decrees of God Strong says, "...his purpose so to act that certain will believe and be saved is called election, and his purpose so to act that certain will refuse to believe and be lost is called reprobation."

This, of course, is the view of historic Calvinism, or should we say historic Augustinianism, the theologian from the past who influenced the thinking of John Calvin. We cannot take time here to deal with Calvinism but there are good books out that clearly set out their teachings and refute them such as Dave Hunt's book, 'What Love is This?'

The most used Scripture to prove this view is Romans 9, the passage that was read for us earlier, and which we will look at it later.

B. Election Based On Foreknowledge

The second view of election is that God, who is omniscient and thus knows everything, foreknew who those individuals who would choose Him of their own free will, and He chose such individuals to salvation. I unapologetically hold to this view, and believe strongly in the free will of man. Every man can and must choose to repent from sin and believe the Gospel or be condemned to hell for all eternity! Worship that does not come from free will is not worship at all.

Let me give a key verse in support of this view (read 1 Peter 1:1-2). Now the word 'elect' in this passage has to do with our doctrine of election and this verse says God's election is according to His foreknowledge. In other words, God made choice way back before He created man, that lost man would have to choose Him, in order for God to save that person.

Let me give a classic passage on this and that is Matthew 22:1-14. I will not take time to read it, but various groups were invited to a wedding and they all made excuse why they could not come. Those who chose not to come were later rejected, and verse 14 says the reason was this: "For many are called but few are chosen." And why are few chosen? The parable clearly sets out the answer that it is because few choose Him! God, from the beginning, has chosen for salvation, those who choose Him. As I see it, the truth that man has a free will and that God chooses such as choose Him is so self evident in Scripture that it should need no exposition.

The major reason why this teaching needs exposition is because of the strong teaching of Calvinism. And Calvinism gets its biggest support from Romans chapter 9. If it can be shown that Romans 9 does not teach predeterminism but free will, it will topple all of Calvinism. Those familiar with Calvinism's five main pillars will understand that if one pillar topples, all five fall. So we go to Romans 9.

III. ELECTION AND ROMANS 9

The passage was read for us earlier. Now let me show you first why this chapter is used to support the view that God chooses man by His own predetermined counsel, and not man's choice of Him. Let us begin by

reading 6-13 (read). Now what seems as clear as anything in this passage is that God's purpose of election takes place before birth and has nothing to do with the choices of the individual. This is so that the purpose of God will stand according to the doctrine of election, which evidently is predeterminism.

Now let us read 14-18 (read). God chooses as He wishes. It has nothing to do with him who wills or him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. If He shows mercy, you will be saved and if not you will be lost. There is nothing you can do about it because it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs. All you have to do is read the account of Pharoah, and you will see this. So clearly, God's choice of certain individuals is based on God's predetermined plan, not on what any person wants.

Now let us read verses 19-24. What could be more clear. God chose certain people to salvation by His predetermined plan and He chose a few to be saved and the majority to be lost, and who are you, oh man, to argue with the Almighty? How dare you, puny little created being, argue with the God of the universe? If He chooses by His predermined counsel, that is none of your business.

Now anyone casually reading through Paul's doctrine of salvation as presented in Romans might well ask, "What on earth is the purpose of Romans 9-11? These chapters do not even fit into this book. They seem unrelated to the rest of Paul's letter." But the reason these chapters are included is that salvation has become largely a 'Gentile' thing and to the Jew, this is unthinkable. What of all the Jew's privileges and prophecies to their blessing?

Let me give you an outline of Romans according to LE Maxwell. 1-8 is doctrinal. 9-11 is dispensational. It has to do with Israel. 12-16 is duties. Now, in that first section, if you and I were to read Romans 1-2 and then were asked the question Paul asks in 3:1, "What advantage then has the Jew or what is the profit of circumcission?" we would have one answer. "They have no advantage, and there is no profit in circumcission." But that is not the correct answer for

Paul answers like this, "Their advantage is much in every way..." And now, in Romans 9 Paul will show why God has set the Jew aside for a time but in chapter 11 he will show that the Jew has a place in God's economy in the future, and it will bring blessing to the whole world. So, in chapter 9 Paul will show to the Jew why God has set them aside for the time being.

In Romans 9:1-5 we have Paul's consternation. Israel, as a nation, is lost. In this passage Israel is viewed conglomerately. That is Paul's concern. Israel, with all its privileges, is lost! And Paul is an Israeli. Then in verses 6-13 we have Paul's consideration. Here it is in a nutshell: Yes, God has set the nation Israel aside and the Gentiles have entered into their blessings. But it is not that the Word of God, which speaks of Israel's future blessings has failed. Are there not hundreds of passages prophesying Israel's blessing in the future? A Messiah? Yes. But the question is, how could Israel be set aside if these prophecies are true?

Well, in 9:6-7 Paul will set out first God's principle of selection, then he will show the 'why' of Israel's rejection. Then he will show them these prophecies in light of Israel's ultimate election. We look then at this divine principle of selection. What is God's principle of selection, or election? Well, they are not all Israel who are of Israel. You are not a true Jew just because your parents are Jewish, any more than that a person is a Christian because his parents are Christians. So, let us never think God's Word has failed because Israel has nationally been set aside. "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel..." Who is a true Jew? A Jew is not a Jew because he is born of Abraham. If that were so, then Ishmael would be a Jew. A Jew is a true Jew because he is born of Abraham, and born of faith as was Isaac.

Paul will now show in verse 9 that his reasoning is correct that not all those born a Jew in the flesh are true Jews. Being a national Israeli does not mean one is personally a believer. Salvation always has been a personal thing, one of faith, not a national one. This is very obvious in Abraham's seed. Being of

the seed of Abraham does not assure that one is a child of God. If it did then Ishmael and his offspring too are children of God. What a horrific thought for the Jew! Surely the Jew must see this. The conclusion to this matter is this: "That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as seed." The children of promise are the children of faith for God promised, but Abraham believed. Isaac was born by promise and by faith. Does the Jew argue that God was wrong in rejecting Ishmael and choosing Isaac? Certainly not.

Now Paul will give evidence that it is the children of promise, those born by faith are the true Jew. Let us read 9 (read). First, it was through Sarah's son Isaac, not through Ishmael that Abraham's seed was to be called. Ishmael represented the works of the flesh and Isaac represented the son of faith. God's principle of selection was based on the son of faith not on the son of works.

This is further clearly demonstrated in Rebecca's twins (read 10-13). God, knowing in His foreknowledge what manner of sons these twins would be, chose the younger over the older before they were born. In the natural realm God should have chosen the firstborn. That is how it was done in Israel. But God chose the younger one before birth so that it must be evident to mankind that His choices are not on the basis of works but on the basis of election. Now why is election, in this verse, set in opposition to works? Because election is based on God's foreknowledge of faith (Romans 11:5-6). So it is written, "The elder shall serve the younger," and again, "Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated."

Now let us read verse 14 (read). Was God wrong in setting aside Esau for Jacob even before birth? Shall we conclude that there is unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! God has a right to choose whom He wills and reject whom He wills. And it is clear that before creation God chose those who would live by faith and rejected those who would seek Him by works. Now Paul will prove God's right to choose whom He wills, and thus, that He chose on the basis of faith. Let us read verse 15 (read). Now we must ask a question: is God's choosing in this verse arbitrary,

or is it based on His righteous character? No doubt it is based on His righteous character, for there is no unrighteousness with God.

Paul will prove this now in verses 15-16 (read 9:15-16). Now let me ask, is God allowed to choose to have mercy on whom He wills and have compassion on whom He wills? Of course, because His decision will always be based in His righteous character. That God's choice is based in His righteous character is shown in Scripture, for the Scriptures tell us on whom He wills to have mercy. For this we first turn to Exodus 20:6 (read). God wills to show mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments. How do you like that? Does that not sound like the choice of a righteous God?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, recognized what triggered God's mercy. Let us read Luke 1:50 (read). God's mercy and compassion is not something that comes and goes without reason. It is established on the firm character of God. Mary says, "His mercy is on those who fear Him." And in the same breath she tells us what turns God to brass for, "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." Ah yes, God will have mercy on whom He wills to have mercy and He wills to have mercy. It is on those who fear Him and are humble. But He wills not to show mercy to the proud. Does this not sound precisely like the God of the Bible?

Now look at 9:16 (read). Here we are shown that which does not trigger God's mercy. It is never triggered by works or by self will and human efforts (9:16). It is the proud who come to God like that. So if God's mercy is extended on the basis of man's response to Him in fear and faith, then, "...it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." In other words God's choice of individuals is not on the basis of works. Abraham willed in Ishmael to help God. He ran and worked to help God out, and what do we have? A son of the flesh. It was not until he bowed in faith to God that his son Isaac was conceived. No, it is not *how much* one pursues God. It is *on what basis* one pursues Him. When one comes by faith God's mercy opens like a flower to the sun. As long as I seek Him by works He clams up and nothing

can move him. All the willing and running will not open Him to us.

Let us continue then with reading 17-19 (read). That God's mercy is withheld from those who are proud and those who will not acknowledge God, is clearly shown in many Scriptures, and here it is clearly shown in Pharaoh. God allowed him to come to his position of power to demonstrate this very fact that His choice is not on the basis of any human merit. It is simply on the basis of faith. To show this He raised up Pharaoh. And God hardened Pharaoh, but in Scripture, we find God did not harden him until he had hardened himself over and over again. You see, the same sun that softens the ice hardens the clay. Yes, whom He wills He hardens and He hardened that proud, stiff necked Pharaoh.

How and why did God harden him? God placed circumstances before Pharaoh that should have softened any man. But instead of softening he called for his own magicians. And then, because of his stubborn unbelief, God allowed his magicians to perform the same miracles Moses had performed. That is how God hardened him. If Pharaoh had fallen to His knees in humility God would not have hardened him in this way. Pharaoh's hardening by God was Pharaoh's choice, not God's. When man stands in proud unbelief God must remain true to His character.

So, in verse 18, how shall we conclude on matters this far? Because He has mercy on whom He wills, and that is those who respond to Him in fear and faith, and whom He wills He hardens, and that is those who are proud and stiff necked.

So let us read verses 19-24. Like the potter, does not God have the right to do with these vessels He made, as He pleases? Yes He does! The contest in Egypt was between the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt (Ex. 12:12). All ten plagues were against specific Egyptian gods. The contest was between a nation that belonged to the true God and a nation that belonged to the devil. The contest was between Moses, a leader who exercised faith, and Pharaoh, a leader who worshiped false gods. He had mercy on Moses, a man of faith, and hardened Pharaoh a man

without faith. It is the faith principle again. Someone has well said, "Unbelief precedes hardening."

Kenneth Wuest, a Calvinist, quoting Vincent on the passage we just read of the potter well says, "...Not fitted by God for destruction, but in an adjective sense, ready, ripe for destruction, the participle denoting a present state previously formed, but given no hint of how it has been formed. An agency of some kind must be assumed. That the objects of final wrath had themselves a hand in the matter may be seen from 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16. That the hand of God is also operative may be inferred from the whole drift of the chapter. `The apostle had probably chosen this form because being ready certainly arises from the continual reciprocal action between human sin and the divine judgment of blindness and hardness. Every development of sin is a net-work of human offences and divine judgment" (Kenneth Wuest on Romans pp. 166-167).

Now let us read 9:26-29. According to these verses, God's principle of selection assures us of two things, and both can be proved by OT prophecy. First, it foretells of the call of the Gentiles (Romans 9:25-26). Second, it assures a remnant of saved Jews at all times (Romans 9:27-29). Has God's Word failed? No! The Gentiles are experiencing salvation and Israel, though by and large a lost nation, has a remnant.

Why have the Jews been rejected at this point in time and why have the Gentiles been elected? That is what Paul will show in summarizing this matter in 9:30-33 (read). So, how should we conclude then on this matter? Here is the conclusion: the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, and had no part in God's election, have attained to righteousness and thus become God's elect. And how did that happen? Well, according to verse 30, it is because they did not seek it by works but by faith.

On the contrary, Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness did not attain it. And why was that? Because they did not seek it by faith, but by works and it is contrary to the character of God to extend

mercy on the basis of works. God does not will to have mercy on such. Surely Israel should have learned this from Abrahams two sons! Surely Israel should have learned this from Rebecca's two sons. Surely Israel should have learned this from Pharoah!

Well, in Romans 10 Paul will show conclusively that Israel did not understand the doctrine of election by grace through faith. In chapter 10 he will show that election is by grace through faith and that a time is coming when Israel will be restored to her place by grace through faith. God's principle of selection is election based on God's grace and man's faith. Yes, the whole of salvation, from election, to justification and on, is all by faith.

CONCL. So in conclusion, what is the doctrine of election? It is the doctrine of God's choice of certain individuals to salvation. And just what kind of individual did God choose for salvation? The kind of person who would respond by repentance and faith to the message of the Gospel. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!" God chose for salvation such as would choose Him of their own free will!

For the Calvinist it is a doctrine only for the elect. Oliver B. Greene in his commentary to Ephesians says this on 1:4: "Election, predestination, and the foreknowledge of God is to be taught to spiritually-minded believers -- never to be preached to unbelievers in a mixed multitude. God pity the preacher who will stand before an audience made up of believers and unbelievers in a mixed audience and preach to that mixed audience that some are elected to be saved, and if they are elected they will be saved; but if they are not elected they cannot be saved. God pity such stupid spiritual ignorance!" (pg. 35).

But to those of Arminian persuasion, election is a doctrine to be preached to all. And once understood aright, what a wonderful doctrine election is to preach to both believer and unbeliever alike. It is a doctrine that extends an invitation to every person! It is an invitation to any one to come at any time. So the fifth to last verse in the Bible gives this comforting invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say , 'Come!' And let Him who hears say, 'Come!'"

And let him who thirsts come. And whosoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely!"

Are you one of God's elect? How can you know? If you have chosen Him by repenting from your sins and receiving Christ as your Savior, you are one of the elect! You can count on it. If you have not done that, you may do so in a very short time. The choice in election is yours!

Finally, do we have anything to do with our election? Or does God do it all arbitrarily? Listen to 2 Peter 1:10, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble."