

Is the Doctrine of Election Biblical

Scripture: John 1:12–13; John 6:37–39; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:33; Romans 9:14–15; Ephesians 1:3–14; Colossians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 5:21; Titus 1:1; 2 John 1
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Among the most hotly contested and persistent debates in the history of the confessing church, the doctrine of election is perhaps the greatest of all. The question goes like this: Does God choose sinners to be saved and then provide for their salvation? Or, Does God provide the way of salvation that sinners must choose for themselves?

Where's the evidence?

This question of *choice* is called "election" because of the Greek word for those who are chosen—the Bible calls them *eklektos*. There are many such uses in the Bible (cf. Colossians 3:12; 1 Timothy 5:21; Titus 1:1; 2 John 1), but one of my favorites is in Romans 8:33: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" The answer is, "no one," but why? Is it because I chose God, or is it because God chose me?

One passage that is critical to the discussion is in the opening chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Immediately after his customary greeting, Paul launches in Ephesians 1:3-14 with a great song of praise. It's only one sentence—but, with 200 words in the Greek, it may be the longest single sentence in religious literature.

Paul touches on all the great biblical themes in that hyper-complex sentence—sanctification, adoption, redemption, and glorification—and all of them rest on one foundational doctrine, the doctrine of election. The most superlative spiritual blessings stand on Ephesians 1:4—"He chose us [elected us] in Him before the foundation of the world."

So the doctrine of election *is* biblical, but what does that passage really teach? I want to help you get a better grasp of that by pointing out what Paul teaches about election. If you are a believer, you can equip yourself for your next conversation on this topic. But more important, as one of His elect you can rejoice in the astonishing kindness God showed you *before the world began*.

What does it mean?

Paul's song is essentially his reflection on the amazing truth that God "blessed us with every spiritual blessing . . . in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). And how did He bless us? "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

God didn't draw straws; He didn't look down the corridor of time to see who would choose Him before He decided. Rather, by His sovereign will He chose who would be in the Body of Christ. The construction of the Greek verb for "chose" indicates God chose us for Himself. That means God acted totally independent of any outside influence. He made His choice totally apart from human will

and purely on the basis of His sovereignty.

Jesus said to His disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). And in the same Gospel, John wrote, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, *but of God*" (John 1:12-13, italics mine). And Paul said, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Those statements defining God's sovereign choice of believers are not in the Bible to cause controversy, as if God's election means sinners don't make decisions. Election does not exclude human responsibility or the necessity of each person to respond to the gospel by faith. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

Admittedly the two concepts don't *seem* to go together. However, both are true separately, and we must accept them both by faith. You may not understand it, but rest assured—it's fully reconciled in the mind of God.

You must understand that your faith and salvation rest entirely on God's election (cf. Acts 13:48). And yet the day you came to Jesus Christ, you did so because of an internal desire—you did nothing against your will. But even that desire is God-given—He supplies the necessary faith so we can believe (Eph. 2:8).

Think about it—if your salvation depends on you, then praise to God is ridiculous. But, in truth, your praise to God is completely appropriate, because in forming the Body before the world began, He chose you by His sovereign decree apart from any of your works. The doctrine of election demonstrates God being God, exercising divine prerogatives. For that we must praise Him.

"But that's not fair!"

Some are shocked to find that God didn't choose everyone to salvation. Jesus said, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that *of all that He has given Me* I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:39, italics mine). God the Father chose certain individuals to form a Body as a gift to Jesus Christ. Every believer is part of that love gift to Christ—a gift of the Father's love to His Son.

To those who say that is unjust, Paul answers: "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Romans 9:14-15).

So why does God still find fault in unrepentant sinners when He didn't choose them? Doesn't this deny human responsibility? Is it fair for God to still hold them accountable?

Paul answers all such questions with a rebuke—"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?" (Romans 9:20). Does the clay jump up and ask the potter why it looks the way it does? Not at all.

Some believe that is terribly cold and calculating. But that is only one side of God's sovereign election. Paul continues in the next chapter by saying, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved . . . for 'whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:9, 13).

How these two sides of God's truth—His sovereignty in choosing us (Romans 9) and our responsibility to confess and believe (Romans 10)—reconcile is impossible for us to understand fully. But Scripture declares both perspectives of salvation to be true (John 1:12-13). It's our duty to acknowledge both and joyfully accept them by faith.

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