

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (6)

The truth that God made elective choices before the foundation of the world may be established in at least two distinct areas:

Area #1 - This truth can be clearly established for those who are saved.

Eph. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13-14; II Tim. 1:9

Area #2 - This truth can be clearly established for those who are lost.

Prov. 16:4; Jude 4; Rev. 17:8

When we consider these passages, we conclude that God wants us to realize that His elective choices were made concerning individuals “before the foundation of the world.”

There are some who accept this, but only in regard to believers. In other words, the position is that election has no reference whatsoever to the unbeliever. However, it must be biblically admitted that this is not a correct belief system (Rom. 9:17; Rev. 17:8). In fact, it can be even logically demonstrated that this is not a correct system of belief.

Dr. Chafer writes: “The idea of election, or selection, cannot be applied to an entire class as unrelated to any others. Hidden in the word election is the implied truth, which is unavoidably a part of it, that others are not chosen, or are passed by. The thought expressed by the word election cannot be modified. It asserts an express intention on the part of God to confer salvation on certain persons but not all. It is not a mere purpose to give salvation to those who may believe; it rather determines who will believe” (*Ibid.*, p. 172).

There can be no doubt that those who have everlasting life were elected to receive it before the foundation of the world and those who do not have everlasting life were not elected (Acts 13:48).

QUESTION #6 – Is it possible for one elected to everlasting life to ever become, by one’s own volition, one not elected to everlasting life?

(Soteriology - Question #22)

If we accept the N.T. statements concerning salvation, which God has put in writing, the answer to this question is an absolute NO! God’s elective purposes are eternal and final (John 6:37; Rom. 8:30; 11:29; II Tim. 2:18-19).

QUESTION #7 – What are the essential biblical truths that must be accepted concerning election, if one believes the Bible?

(Soteriology - Question #23)

There are certain truths that must be embraced concerning this doctrine if the Bible is really believed:

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Truth #1 - God has chosen some to salvation but not all.

Even though at times this truth is resisted, it is a biblical and factual truth. God chooses certain individuals (Rom. 16:13). God chooses people for salvation (II Thess. 2:13). God chooses people to salvation before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

Lewis Sperry Chafer, in analyzing these passages, said this: “There can be no question raised but that these passages contemplate an act of God by which some are chosen, but not all” (Vol. 3, p. 172).

There is no sense trying to deny this truth for the Bible certainly establishes that God has chosen some to salvation, but not all to salvation.

Truth #2 - God’s choices were made in eternity past.

Some people believe that election takes place in time and the idea of election has to do with the sending of the Gospel to men. In other words, election means that in time past God decided that at some point in time the Gospel would be presented to sinful men.

As we have already observed, many Scriptures teach us that God made His elective decisions “before the foundation of the world.” There is a powerful passage of Scripture that clearly refutes any such concept of election—II Thess. 2:13-14. Here we read, “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. And it was for this He called you through our Gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As Chafer observed: “Thus it is said that election is “from the beginning” which corresponds to that beginning cited in John 1:1. The gospel, it is said, served as the call which fulfilled the eternal election to salvation” (*Ibid.*, p. 173).

Truth #3 - God’s election does not merely depend on foreknowledge.

There are those who try and base election on the foreknowledge of God which foresees the faith of those God knew would believe. Such a position singles out one attribute and neglects several other key points. No place in Scripture is it said foreknowledge has to do with who God knew would believe, but with whom God knew He would elect (I Pet. 1:1-2).

Perhaps no other writer has dealt more adequately or extensively with this point as Lewis Sperry Chafer. Although perhaps lengthy, his discussion on this point is worth printing, reading and contemplating:

“The obvious distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination, or predestination, has been the occasion for much discussion, there being those who assert that God, by His foreknowledge, discriminated between those who by their own choice would accept salvation and those who would not, and, being thus informed, God was able to predestinate those He knew would believe.

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The superficial character of this notion is seen (1) in the fact that the foreknowledge and foreordination, or predestination, could not be placed in sequence. Nothing could be foreknown as certain that had not been made certain by foreordination, nor could anything be foreordained that was not foreknown. Of three passages bearing on the relationship between these two divine activities, two mention foreknowledge first in order, while the other reverses this arrangement. In Romans 8:29 it is written, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate"; and in I Peter 1:2 believers are addressed as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." But in Acts 2:23, where the divine purpose in Christ's death is in view, it is said: "him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." (2) The Scriptures declare that that which cometh to pass is foreordained of God and not merely foreknown. Salvation is by grace apart from works. Men are not saved because of good works whether anticipated or realized. Election is according to grace and not according to works. If salvation be by grace, it is no more of works, and if it be by works, it is no more of grace (Romans 11:5-6). In light of this revelation, it is impossible to build a foreseen structure of works as the ground of any person's salvation. Similarly, there is divine authority for denying that faith and personal holiness, even foreseen, determine divine election. The Bible reverses this order by declaring that election is unto faith and holiness. It is no slight error to confuse these issues and make faith and holiness the cause and election the effect. Faith can serve no greater purpose than to be the means by which that which God has determined may be realized. Referring again to passages already cited, it will be seen that God chose from the beginning those to be saved, and predestinated them to "belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13); and He chose some before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph. 1:4). Thus it is revealed that men are not first holy and then elect; but they are first elect and that election is unto holiness. As an illustration of this order in the truth, the Apostle refers to the divine choice of Jacob over Esau before they were born and before they had done either good or evil.

All this, it is said, is to the end that the divine election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth (Rom. 9:10-13). It may be added that acceptable works and qualities are not resident in any fallen human being, except these characteristics are wrought in the human heart by divine energy. It would therefore be folly to expect that God would foresee in men what could never exist. Doubtless, multitudes of people cling to a conditional election lest they be forced to recognize the depravity of man" (*Ibid.*, pp. 173-174).

God's election does not rest on a foreknowledge that sees some future good in man, for there is none that doeth good and all man's works are as filthy rags—thus saith the written revelation of God.

Truth #4 - God's election is completely immutable.

II Timothy 2:19 makes it clear that even though there will be those who will try to upset the faith of some, "the firm foundation of God stands" and the Lord knows those who are His. Furthermore, we read in Romans 8:30 that those God predestinates are also glorified. What this practically means is that all who are predestinated are called and all who are called are justified and all who are justified are glorified. There cannot be any more or any less who are the elect or God has not accomplished what He sovereignly set out to accomplish.

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There are those who attempt to make the will of man capable of thwarting the will of God. There are those who believe that really God can do nothing more than adjust and accommodate Himself to the will of man. Let it be known that God has never created a human being so that the human could defeat His own purpose. God's sovereign plan and will are immutable and it is absurd and a great demeaning of God to suggest that God's purposes may be frustrated by the will of man. Such an idea will not be found in the Bible.

Truth #5 - God's election has a relationship to Christ's death.

There is a major debate in theology that attempts to connect Christ's death to God's election. The issue debated is this: 1) Did Jesus Christ die for men because they were elected to salvation or 2) Men are elected to salvation because Christ died for them?

This is a very difficult question to answer. When we examine a text like Revelation 13:8, we see that the Lamb that was slain is clearly referenced to the time frame "from the foundation of the world." This would seem to lend itself to the interpretation that Christ died because of election.

The words of Dr. Chafer are so true when it comes to this doctrine—"If the best of men were to devise a program for the Almighty, it is probably they would not include election at all, and it is more than certain that their scheme would not start with election in sovereign grace apart from all values of human merit. The doctrine of election is not without its difficulties—precisely such, indeed, as are normal when the finite mind assays to trace the paths of infinity.

Within his own consciousness, man recognizes little outside his own power of determination; however, in the end and regardless of the means by which man has reached his destiny, it will be that destiny which was not only foreseen, but was divinely purposed. Such must be the convictions of every devout soul that contemplates the obvious truth, that the Creator is as resourceful in executing His purposes as He is in originating them" (Vol. 3, pp. 175-176).

QUESTION #8 – Since elective decisions were made before the foundation of the world, what is the actual order in which God made His elective decisions?

(Soteriology - Question #24)

This question has been a highly debated theological question especially in the arena of soteriology—the doctrine of salvation. When considering the whole matter of elective decrees, there are logically five decrees that must come into focus:

- 1) The decree to elect some to salvation and leave others to their just condemnation.
- 2) The decree to create all men.
- 3) The decree to permit the fall of men.
- 4) The decree to provide salvation for men.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation to men.