

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION (9)

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.

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Godly, mature men of the Word of God have attempted to sift through the Scriptures in order to figure out the specific revealed order of these God-given decrees. On the one hand, it would seem that God would view His entire elective program as one thought; however, on the other hand, it seems that one decree does set the stage for another decree in almost a cause and effect manner.

There have been at least four different attempts at putting some order to the elective decrees of God, and three of the views contain the word “lapsarian.” This word “lapsarian,” as Dr. Chafer observes, “refers to one who believes in the doctrine that man is a fallen being” (*Ibid.*, p. 178).

The various views of elective order are as follows:

View #1 - Supralapsarian. This group interprets the order of decrees as follows:

- 1) The decree to elect some to be saved and to reprobate all others.
- 2) The decree to create men both elect and non-elect.
- 3) The decree to permit the fall.
- 4) The decree to provide salvation for the elect.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation to the elect.

This particular group is often given the title “Ultra-Calvinist” or “Hyper-Calvinist.” The special doctrinal issue at stake here is that this group makes the decree to elect some and not elect some as God’s first decree.

This means that God elected men to their destiny before they were created and before they fell.

It would certainly seem that before God can decree who will be elected to salvation, He must have a decree to create man. Electing people to salvation is only possible if there is a decree to create people. Furthermore, the death penalty is given as a direct result of the fall (Gen. 2:17). Logically speaking, if there were no fall, there would be no non-elect because there would be no condemnation. So it would seem that the decree to elect some out of the world (John 15:19) follows a decree to permit the fall.

If this perspective is held, then God actually decrees people to hell before He decrees their creation and before He permits the fall. Again the words of Dr. Chafer are valuable here: “It is true that God, as First Cause, effected man’s existence knowing who would be reprobate, but this responsibility, like that of the presence of sin in the world, is never reckoned from the creature back upon God” (*Ibid.*, p. 179).

View #2 - Infralapsarian. This group interprets the order of decrees as follows:

- 1) The decree to create all men.

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- 2) The decree to permit the fall.
- 3) The decree to provide salvation for men.
- 4) The decree to elect those who do believe and leave to just condemnation those who do not believe.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation to those who do believe.

This particular group is often given the title “Modern Calvinists.” The main distinctive of this view is that the decree to elect follows the decree to permit the fall.

View #3 - Sublapsarian. This group interprets the order of decrees as follows:

- 1) The decree to create all men.
- 2) The decree to permit the fall.
- 3) The decree to elect those who do believe and leave in just condemnation those who do not believe.
- 4) The decree to provide salvation for men.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation to those who believe.

This particular group is also given the title “Modern Calvinists.” The specific feature of this school of thought is that it places the decree to elect before the decree to provide salvation. Thus the difference between infralapsarianism and sublapsarianism is that infralapsarianism allows for unlimited redemption (the belief that Christ died for all men), whereas sublapsarianism allows for limited redemption (the belief that Christ died for only the elect).

View #4 - Arminian. This group interprets the order of decrees as follows:

- 1) The decree to create all men.
- 2) The decree to permit the fall.
- 3) The decree to provide salvation for men.
- 4) The decree to elect some to salvation based on foreseen virtue, faith and obedience.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation to those who believe.

This view is basically identical to that of the infralapsarian, with one major difference—it makes God’s elective decree to save a person determined by human merit.

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This must be rejected, for it is clear from the Bible that election is never based on the goodness of man or the choice of man, but on the pure grace of God (Rom. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:8-9). God chooses to save the foolish and weak and sinful (I Cor. 1:26-27; Rom. 5:20), not the virtuous or impressive.

Every one of these decrees was made “before the foundation of the world.” From God’s perspective, He had His entire program completely arranged. Although we will certainly never fully know the answers to these sovereign decrees, it is good to ponder them and it is good to recognize the greatness of our Sovereign, Glorious God.

For what it is worth, we would offer the following perspective in our limited understanding:

- 1) The decree to create men.
- 2) The decree to permit the fall.
- 3) The decree to provide salvation.
- 4) The decree to elect some.
- 5) The decree to apply salvation.

QUESTION #9 – Does the Bible teach that God can and will do whatever He wants to do?
(Soteriology - Question #25)

From a careful study of both the O.T. and the N.T., the answer is yes! The entire Bible teaches us that God is absolutely sovereign over all things.

There are many passages that make this point very clear:

- 1) Gen. 14:19 - God possesses all things.
- 2) Exodus 18:11 - God is greater than all.
- 3) Deut. 10:14-17 - God owns all things.
- 4) I Chron. 29:11-12 - God has total dominion over all things.
- 5) II Chron. 20:6 - God rules over all things and all powers.
- 6) Neh. 9:6 - God sovereignly created and preserves all things.
- 7) Job 42:2 - God can do whatever He wants to do.
- 8) Psalm 22:28 - God rules over all nations.

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- 9) Psalm 47:2, 3, 7, 8 - God is the King over everything.
- 10) Psalm 50:10-12 - God owns all things.
- 11) Psalm 103:19 - God is sovereign over everything.
- 12) Psalm 115:3 - God does whatever He wants.
- 13) Psalm 135:5-6 - God does whatever He pleases.
- 14) Proverbs 21:1 - God turns the mind of anyone, any way He wants.
- 15) Isaiah 43:13 - God's will cannot be hindered by anyone or anything.
- 16) Isaiah 45:5-10 - God does whatever He wants to do.
- 17) Jeremiah 18:6 - God is the potter, people are the clay.
- 18) Jeremiah 27:5 - God does what is right according to His sight.
- 19) Daniel 4:35 - God does what He wants with whomever He wants.
- 20) John 1:13 - God's will determines who will be born again.
- 21) Acts 2:23 - God's will determined the execution of Jesus Christ.
- 22) Acts 18:21 - God's will determines the boundaries of specific ministries.
- 23) Romans 9:15 - God has mercy on whomever He sovereignly determines.
- 24) Ephesians 1:11 - God does all things according to His sovereign will.
- 25) James 1:18 - God saved people according to His will.
- 26) James 4:14-15 - God determines and wills our daily future.
- 27) Revelation 4:11 - God is to be glorified because He created all things. (This even includes the wicked—Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:22-23.)

We must conclude, after examining passages like these, that the Bible clearly establishes the sovereignty of God. He can and does do whatever seems best for Him to do.

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QUESTION #10 – Since the Bible clearly teaches that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, is it possible to connect God’s sovereignty to personal salvation?
(Soteriology - Question #26)

Actually, by virtue of the fact that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, it is impossible not to connect God’s sovereignty to personal salvation.

In an attempt to unfold what the Scripture teaches on this subject, there are several biblical observations that must be made:

- 1) A lost person has a mind blinded by Satan so that he is incapable, in and of himself, of understanding the Gospel. II Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 2:1-3; II Tim. 2:24-26
- 2) A lost person has a will so rebellious against God that cannot understand or will not seek God. Rom. 3:10-12
- 3) A lost person is convicted of sin by God. John 16:8a
- 4) A lost person is convicted of righteousness by God. John 16:8b
- 5) A lost person is convicted of judgment by God. John 16:8c
- 6) A lost person is drawn to Christ by God. John 6:37, 44
- 7) A lost person is given understanding by God. II Cor. 4:3-6
- 8) A lost person is granted repentance by God. II Tim. 2:24-26; Acts 11:18
- 9) A lost person has a heart opened by God. Acts 16:14
- 10) A lost person is given faith by God. Eph. 2:8
- 11) A lost person is given salvation by God. Eph. 2:8-9; John 1:12-13; James 1:18; Acts 13:48

The biblical record definitely testifies to the reality that “salvation is of the Lord.” God wants His people to understand that salvation is His work.

Floyd Barackman, a contemporary theologian, writes:

“Although the sinner must believe the gospel to be saved, yet he cannot receive credit for this, for all of salvation (including salvational faith) is wholly God’s work. In the application of salvation the sinner does cooperate with God in the sense that he must receive the Savior (Acts 16:31).