

Question #12: What Is Election?*

Among evangelical believers, the doctrine of God's election stands as one of the most controversial subjects found in Scripture. Millard Erickson defines the term "election" as "God's positive choice of individuals, nations, or groups to eternal life and fellowship with him" (Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 120-1). Wayne Grudem, in the book which serves as the basis for this study, gives the following as his definition for election: "An act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure" (Grudem, *Christian Beliefs*, 79). Before noting some of the implications and answering some questions this seemingly troubling definition surfaces, we must look at what Scripture says concerning God's election.

I. New Testament Teaching on Election

- A. Acts 13:48 -- "As many as were appointed to eternal life believed"
- B. Ephesians 1:4-6 -- God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
- C. 2 Timothy 1:9 -- God saved us and called us, not on the basis of our works, but for his own purposes and grace. These were given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.
- D. Revelation 17:8 -- Those found in written in the book of life have been there from the foundation of the world.

II. Implications of this Teaching for the Believer

A. What this Means

1. The doctrine of election should serve as a comfort for believers because we know that God has worked, is working, and will work the events of our lives for His and our ultimate good, our glorification into Christlikeness (Romans 8:28-30).
2. This doctrine should motivate us to live "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:12) because of the great salvation that God has chosen to give to us (1 Thess. 1:2-4; 2:13). We have done nothing to earn God's grace; rather, He has done everything involved in saving us (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus, as believers saved by God, we should seek to live right and do works that please God because we are his beautiful work (Eph. 2:10).
3. While some believe election stymies evangelism, the doctrine should actually motivate us to witness because we know that God uses human means (evangelism) to accomplish his purposes, even in salvation (2 Tim. 2:10).

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B. What this Doesn't Mean

1. The doctrine of election does not mean that we don't make real choices and our actions don't have consequences.
 - a) There are numerous invitations throughout Scripture (Rev. 22:17; Matt. 11:28) that imply that we must make a real choice in response to God's summons. On top of this, all the commands of Scripture, whether they are related to salvation or obedience, imply that we must make real decisions and choices whether to believe and obey or reject and live in disobedience to God.
 - b) The decisions and choices that we do make have real and eternal consequences that we will experience (John 3:18). Yet, we must be careful to avoid the notion that God's decision to save us is based upon our choices. Faith is our response to God's great work of salvation. Scripture never says it is the reason that God saves us. Rather, the reason God chooses to save us is to accomplish the purpose of his will, which is His ultimate plan for this universe (Eph. 1:4-6).
2. The doctrine of election does not mean that our God is an impersonal being that has created and is ruling over an impersonal and inflexible universe. Rather, God deeply loves his creation, especially humanity, and on the basis of his love He has acted to save (Eph. 1:5; John 3:16; Rom. 8:28).

III. Questions the Doctrine of Election Raises

A. Are We Really Free?

1. Some will object that if this doctrine is true, then we aren't really free. While many today, including the author of this study Wayne Grudem, avoid using the term "free" choice/will, the idea of "free will/choice" still seems to be the correct way to understand the Biblical evidence of human choices in response to God's plan and commands (See Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, 230-234).
2. Throughout scripture, we are asked to make right decisions by obeying God's commands. This implies that we are free to do so.
3. God uses human choices to accomplish his own will and plan (John 6:37; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).
4. God holds humans accountable for their choices so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20), and He is never blamed for their rejection of Him (John

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8:43-44; 5:40).

5. Because God is an omniscient God, He foreknows not only what his creatures will do, but also what they possibly could and would do in other circumstances. Thus, when he chose to create this universe, He ordained a plan that included what He wanted to accomplish through the means of his own actions and the free choices of his creatures. While there is a great deal of mystery involved in such a scheme, this model explains how God's preordained plan is accomplished while human freedom is maintained.

B. Is God Really Fair?

1. If the doctrine of election is true, some might object that this isn't fair to those who are unsaved.
2. While real fairness would mean that everyone be judged and sent to hell, God has chosen to save a great uncountable multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9).
3. Paul responded to this exact question in Romans 9:18-24 by saying that we as the creature/clay have no right to question the Creator/Potter. The questioning of God on this account really reveals a great deal about the stubbornness of the creature to submit to our Sovereign God. The one who claims unfairness and rejects God on this account condemns him/herself through unbelief.
4. God has chosen to save a great many, and He calls on all to respond to his call (Romans 10:13). Yet, Humanity's choice to reject God's revelation and live according to their sinful flesh and desires places them under God's judgment (Romans 1:18-32). They have no one to blame but themselves.

C. Does God Want Everyone to Be Saved?

1. Yes, Scripture clearly teaches this (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). These verses express God's wish or desire for his creation. They are what He wants for his creation.
2. Yet, God's will (what actually comes to pass in this universe) does not include the salvation of everyone.
3. Thus, we must conclude that God wills and permits things to occur that He does not wish to happen (i.e., unbelief by those who reject his Son). While the rejection of people grieves God greatly (Ezek. 33:11; Luke 19:41; Matt.

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23:37), His justice demands that such sinners must be punished in light of his righteousness.

Conclusion: The doctrine of election shows us how much our God loves us. We don't deserve this love, nor did we do anything to earn it. Our response should be praise and obedience to God for his great gift of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).

Questions to Ponder

1. How does your understanding of the doctrine of election cause you to rejoice?
2. What troubles you about it?

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