

Election Unto Salvation

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Introduction

Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension reveal many purposes in God's unfolding restoration of humanity and His creation. God entered this world in the likeness of human flesh and the person of the Holy Spirit to bring about man's complete rebirth and transformation. God's provisions for us include election, repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, assurance, and security. Christ is Lord and King over all, but without royal subjects to govern, there is no King, and there can be no Kingdom.

The doctrine of election is one of the most controversial theologies in the church, divided into two major groups: Calvinists and Armenians. The more extreme Calvinistic view, called doctrines of unconditional election, teaches the elect to be chosen entirely apart from any repentance and faith on their part. They also believe in limited atonement, meaning Christ only died for those He chose. These ideas are based on the belief that Christ only "efficiently calls," implying He only calls those He has previously elected for salvation.ⁱ However, the scripture is clear; Christ died for all humanity, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.ⁱⁱ

Repentance

Receiving Christ requires more than simply believing in Him. Illustrated in the story of the prodigal son, Jesus mainly preached repentance.ⁱⁱⁱ He placed great importance on turning away from our sins before we could believe in Him for our salvation. The root meaning of repentance is a change of mind or purpose; it is a sincere and thorough changing of the mind and disposition regarding sin. Thus, turning from sin requires confessing, forsaking it, and turning to God.^{iv}

It must never be considered deserving of a reward or praise, believing we must perform some work or penance for God to grant salvation. The Roman Catholic Church views repentance as a satisfaction that the sinner presents to God. This is a false theology and portrays the sinner as able to do something for their salvation instead of realizing the helplessness and seeing that our salvation is entirely God's provision through His marvelous grace.^v In contrast, Thiessen says we are not saved *for* repenting, but *if* we repent.

We read, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).^{vi} The emphasis, here again, is on "repentance." But some scholars ignore this fact, citing the words of Paul, where he paraphrased, *"What must I do to be saved? So they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16:30-31). They presume that because Paul did not mention repentance, they misconstrue his intent with this verse and ignore God's requirement for repentance that leads to salvation. One requires the other.

Repentance *does* require an intellectual understanding of sin and God's desire that we turn away from it. We read, *"For by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Romans 3:20).^{vii} But more importantly, it also involves a volitional (voluntary) and emotional response. While the understanding of sin can bring guilt and even tears before God, only our voluntary and emotional response can yield Godly sorrow that leads to repentance.^{viii} This voluntary element requires exercising the will and inward desire to turn away from sin. Hence, we must distinguish the difference between shame and genuine sorrow, as there is a vast difference between remorse and repentance.

But the importance of repentance in our salvation cannot be understated. It is continuous throughout the stories of the Old Testament and was brought into focus with God's Mosaic Covenant given to Israel. And its fulfillment is revealed in the Gospels. For example, we read, *"The LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets"* (2 Kings 17:13).^{ix}

Repentance is a gift from God, not something we can bring about ourselves.^x Without it, man will perish and suffer eternal death. But the repentance of even one sinner will bring unspeakable joy in Heaven.^{xi} With the conviction of the Holy Spirit, repentance will lead to our confession of sins and often to make restitution for them—the fruit of repentance.^{xii} Repentance can come through believing the truth of God's word, hearing the preaching of the Gospel, through God's reproof and chastisement, through the goodness of God, through the loving reproof of a brother in Christ, or through God's providing a vision of Himself, thereby illuminating our sin.^{xiii} We read, *"When He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"* (John 16:8).

In preparation for the coming Messiah, John the Baptist preached in the Judean wilderness, declaring, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* (Matthew 3:2). And Jesus Himself primarily preached on repentance. We read, *"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17).^{xiv}

Repentance is the will of the Lord and the command for every man to repent. We read, *"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent"* (Acts

17:30); *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9).

Miracles of themselves would not produce repentance, even the coming back from the dead.^{xv} Jesus instructed His disciples concerning the great commission to preach, saying, *"That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (24:47). Hence, the disciples preached repentance. As we read, *"So they went out and preached that people should repent"* (Mark 6:12).^{xvi} And Paul preached repentance, *"Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21).^{xvii}

Election

Per Thiessen, election means *"The sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom He foreknew would repent and accept Him."*^{xviii} Election is God's sovereign choice because He does not need to consult with anyone concerning it. And since His election occurred before the foundation of the world, there would have been no one to include, only the eternal Godhead. Election is also a sovereign act of God's grace, as all have sinned; only a holy and righteous God could make such a perfect decision without bias of human error or wickedness.

The Bible refers to God's people as *"the elect,"* as in chosen. Some say this term only applies to Israel, but that is inaccurate. God elects all whom He chooses, redeems us, and sets us apart for His holy service. Paul said, *"Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded"* (Romans 11:7). Here, Paul was speaking to the Gentiles, those whom God had called, not only of Israel only but also of the nations.^{xix} If Israel did not go, God would find another. Jesus warned Israel, saying, *"God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones"* (Matthew 3:9). Any offer of salvation must be an act of grace, as man is unworthy of it. And because only Jesus could provide the righteousness which God required and mankind needed, God's election of man is *in Christ*; hence, we read, *"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption"* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

God's election is according to His foreknowledge. We read, *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..."* (Romans 8:28); *"To the pilgrims of the Dispersion... elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."* (1 Peter 1:1-2). Scholars of the extreme position on election support their theology on these verses and others. Frequently, they erroneously believe that God has somehow rejected or unelected Israel, yet Paul says, *"God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew..."* (Romans 11:2). But Paul also noted that many of his people were also perishing for their rejection of Christ.^{xx} Hence, God's foreknowledge is not an assurance of election.

Foreknowledge is far different from foreordaining, and foreknowledge no more changes the nature of future events than afterknowledge can change historical facts. There is no difference between what God determines to bring to pass and what He merely permits to occur. Additionally, foreknowledge does not require predestination, and foreknown events may or may not have been predestined.^{xxi} For example, God foreknew that Adam and Eve would fall into sin, but He did not predestine them to do so. And He did not predestine the Holocaust, yet He knew that it would happen, even allowing it. In Israel's case, He foreknew them, yet He allowed them to reject His Son. Thiessen says:

"Certainly, only few who hold the view of "unconditional election" would teach that God is the efficient cause of sin: practically all would agree that God merely permitted sin to enter the universe, and all would admit that He foresaw that it would enter before He created anything. If God could foresee that sin would enter the universe without efficiently decreeing that it should enter, then He can also foresee how men will act without efficiently decreeing how they shall act."^{xxii}

God, being outside of time because He created it, in His foreknowledge, has looked to future events of humanity. Seeing and knowing everything from the beginning to the end has enabled Him to elect those He foreknew would choose Him. Having chosen His own "in Christ," God was not looking at man in Himself, but as He sees us in Christ. Those selected are the ones who were in Christ, even before we chose Him, and by His foreknowledge, He already saw us there in Christ when He made that choice.^{xxiii} God did not determine who should be there. He merely saw us there in Christ when He chose us. God saw us in Christ because we exercised our free will and decided to believe in His Son, as we read, *"That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:15).*

Unconditional election usurps our freedom to choose, and nowhere does the Bible teach that some are predestined to eternal life and others to eternal damnation, also called "double predestination." We read, *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).* It is not man's non-election that leads to his eternal damnation, it is his sinful and rebellious nature that causes him to reject God's redemptive gift of salvation found only in Jesus.

The Bible tells us we are all children of wrath, destined for hell and eternal separation from God.^{xxiv} We are all perishing. So thinking that God only chooses to save some is akin to believing that God's election is biased toward individual favoritism. Yet, we read that God has no partiality with man.^{xxv} Nor would God only choose certain people based on an unprescribed measure of contrived self-righteousness, as none are righteous.^{xxvi} Unprescribed because there is no Law or statute in the Bible that God says He would use to measure our righteousness. Hence, none are saved through the Law; as Paul said, *"No one is justified by the law in the sight of God" (Galatians 3:11).*

So what would motivate God to elect some to eternal salvation and not others? In truth, God's love motivates Him to save all men and is not willing that any should perish.^{xxvii} But His grace is only received by those who choose to accept His Son as Lord and Savior. Therefore, God's election is not arbitrary but an act of grace towards all who receive Him. And there is no good quality in us that God could not use to choose some and not others. Salvation is a gift, and it is given freely to all who receive Christ.^{xxviii} Therefore, Jesus instructed us to complete the great commission by sharing the Gospel with everyone.^{xxix}

Conclusion

The doctrine of election can only be applied to those in Christ, not the unsaved. Paul's epistle to the Romans sets forth God's plan of salvation, and his discussion on election is not until the eighth chapter, concluding with the truth and assurance of God's inseparable love from us. In Christ, we are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.^{xxx} Again, foreknowledge is not the same as predestination. God did not predestine us to choose Jesus; he predestined us to be conformed to the image of Christ because He foreknew that we would choose Him. And because He foreknew that we would accept Jesus, He saw us there already in Christ when He chose us.

Amen!

ⁱ Duffield, Guy P. and Van Cleave, Nathaniel M. *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*. Foursquare Media. 1910.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 11:28. Romans 10:13.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 15:18-20.

^{iv} Luke 15:21. Proverbs 28:13. Isaiah 55:7. 1 Thessalonians 1:9. Acts 26:18. James 4:7.

^v Romans 9:11.

^{vi} All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

^{vii} Psalm 51:3-4.

^{viii} Psalm 51:7. Job 42:5-6. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10.

^{ix} Deuteronomy 30:10. Jeremiah 8:6. Ezekiel 14:6, 18:30. 2 Chronicles 7:14.

^x Acts 5:31, 11:18. 2 Timothy 2:25. Hebrews 12:16-17.

^{xi} Luke 13:3, 15:7.

^{xii} Luke 18:13, 19:8.

^{xiii} John 3:5-6. Acts 2:37. Matthew 12:41. Romans 2:4. 2 Peter 3:9. Hebrews 12:6, 10-11. Revelation 3:19. Job 42:5-6. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

^{xiv} Matthew 9:13, 11:20, 12:41.

^{xv} Matthew 11:20-21. Luke 16:30-31.

^{xvi} Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18.

^{xvii} Acts 26:20. 2 Corinthians 12:21. 2 Timothy 2:25.

^{xviii} Thiessen, 344.

^{xix} Romans 9:24.

^{xx} Romans 11:14.

^{xxi} 1 Samuel 23:1-13. Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm*. Lexham Press, Bellingham, WA. 2015.

^{xxii} Thiessen, 346.

xxiii Ephesians 1:3-5.

xxiv Ephesians 2:1-3, 12. 2 Corinthians 4:3.

xxv Romans 2:11.

xxvi Romans 3:10.

xxvii 2 Peter 3:9.

xxviii Romans 5:15-18. Hebrews 2:9. Acts 17:30.

xxix Mark 16:15-16.

xxx Romans 8:29.