

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

(God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility)

The main question of election 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?

Is it one or the other? Or is it inexplicably both at the same time?

In trying to best understand the biblical doctrine of election (with respect to salvation); it is important to hold to a balanced biblical position.

We will look at both biblical truths –God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility. They are twin truths. They both must be upheld and thought with the greatest discretion possible. For it is the word of the living God we are dealing with.



We have before us a set of railroad tracks. The two lines run parallel. They never cross each other. Both are needed to get the passengers to destination. Heaven's "train of grace" runs on both tracks.

As we look at them they appear to be parallel and we cannot see how they could ever come together, but when we look at them in the far distance, at the horizon, they meet.

So it is with these God-revealed truths. We have trouble understanding how they come together, but in the mind of God there is no issue.

Let us view one track as God's sovereignty and the opposite track as man's responsibility.

God's Sovereignty in Election

Epilégo, the Greek verb for "choose" indicates God "selected" or "picked" us out for Himself. He made His choice totally apart from human will and purely on the basis of His sovereignty. He is God and He alone has the absolute right and freedom of will to do according to His good pleasure and just purposes.

➤ [Daniel 4:35](#)

"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

➤ [Psalms 24:1-2](#)

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters".

➤ [Psalms 135:6](#)

"The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths"

With these awe-inspiring verses as our catalyst let us look at some verses affirming God's election in salvation, from the New Testament.

➤ [John 15:16](#)

- You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you.
- [2 Thess 2:13](#)
God from the beginning chose you for salvation.
 - [Ephesians 1:4](#)
He (Christ) chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.
 - [2 Tim. 1:9](#)
God, who saved usaccording to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.
 - [Luke 12:32](#)
“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen to gladly give you the kingdom.”
 - [1 Thessalonians 1:4](#)
For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you.
 - [Colossians 3:12-14](#)
So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion ... and patience.
 - [Matt. 22:14](#)
“Many are called, but few are chosen.”
 - [John 1:13](#)
Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
 - [James 1:18](#)
Of His own will He brought us forth (begot us) by the word of truth.
 - [John 6:39](#)
And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day.
 - [John 6:65](#)
No one can come to Me unless the Father enables Him.
 - [Phil.1:29](#)
For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.
 - [Acts 13:48](#)
And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.
 - [2 Peter 1:1](#)

To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours.

➤ [Eph. 2:8](#)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

➤ [Heb 12:2](#)

"...Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith"

These assertions 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.

Man's Responsibility to Believe in the Saviour

Now we look at some verses that offer salvation to all mankind, not only to the elect.

➤ [1 Tim. 2:4](#)

God desires all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.

➤ [2 Peter 3:9](#)

The Lord is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

➤ [Acts 17:30](#)

God...now commands all men everywhere to repent.

➤ [John 6:40](#)

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life.

➤ [Romans 10:13](#)

Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

➤ [John 3:16](#)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Having looked at a few verses that present the parallel tracks of truths, we must admit that the two sides of God's truth—His sovereignty in choosing us and our responsibility to repent, confess and believe is impossible for us to understand fully. The two concepts don't seem to go together. There is the greatest of tension between the two.

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However, both are true separately, and we must accept them both by faith, just as we accept the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery Jesus Christ's hypostatic union—that He is both God and Man at the same time.

Trying to reconciling them both in our puny, finite minds is impossible, but rest assured—all is fully reconciled in the mind of God.

C. H. Spurgeon: *These twin truths are not enemies, but friends. Friends don't need reconciliation.*

The elect cannot take any glory for their salvation and place in heaven, and Christ rejecting sinners will only have themselves to blame for their damnation in hell.

C. H. Spurgeon: *Your damnation is your own election, not God's.*

Now having said all this, as a believer you must understand that your existence, your faith and salvation rest entirely on God's sovereignty. Nevertheless the day you received Jesus Christ, you did so because of an internal desire—you did nothing against your will. But even that desire is God-given—Holy Spirit energized. *For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Phil 2:13).*

Salvation is the sovereign work of God on the dead and blind sinner. Receiving and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, is impossible for any sinner, God must grant the power supernaturally and with it the divine life and light to the lifeless, darkened sinner (John MacArthur).

The Holy Spirit supplies the necessary faith so we can believe (Eph. 2:8). The Holy Spirit grants the repentance and accomplishes the conversion of the soul. No one can get saved unless the Holy Spirit decides it's the appointed time.

Think about it—if your faith, repentance and salvation depended on you, then praise to God is ludicrous. You would be justified in making great boasts.

Like— I was good enough to choose Christ. I had within my sinful and rebellious nature the moral strength and ability to choose Christ when I wanted. So that's what I did.

I was in total control in regards to getting saved or not. God my creator was simply waiting on the sidelines. He was subject to my timing. I decided when He should respond to my decision for Him.

Imagine a Christian standing up to pray and pray this way:

Thank you God, that I chose you without any help on your part. Without the intervention of your Holy Spirit. Or better still, thank you God, I chose you first and because of it, you chose me and then decided to give me work in the kingdom.

Thank you God that out of my own free will and human power I mustered up the faith that got me saved.

This kind of boasting and praying would be unimaginable for a born – again believer, saved purely by unmerited favour and the mercy of Almighty God.

Now, I'd like to say something about the phrase "free will". The term is not biblical. You will not find it anywhere in Holy Scripture, you will only find it in the writings of men.

Yes, we all have a will, volition, and we can employ it for good or bad. But it is always with limitations. No one besides God possesses unlimited “free will” in the sense of having a will that is absolutely independent of anyone or anything. God alone can choose to do anything, anytime, anyplace, with anyone, when He pleases.

Since the fall of man, our human wills are not as “free” as some think they are. Think about, if someone is unsaved, lost and still in his sins, his will is enslaved –it isn’t totally free—it is essentially under the control of Satan.

In the entirety of his depravity, no matter how much a lost sinner “wills”, and try’s to free him from the guilt of sin and its power, he can’t do it by himself. It is impossibility! God must sovereignty act upon the sinner’s will, mind and heart in order to set him free from his enslaved condition.

If one is saved, and has been freed from his sins and Satan’s grip and kingdom, his will has become with all intents and purposes subject to God’s will. Man’s limited will power, is either under the pull of Satan or under the pull of God.

What we need not forget, is that everyone—Satan, sinner and saint, holy angel and demon is subject to God’s perfect will. God is subject to no one’s will.

Some are taken aback to find that God didn't choose everyone to salvation. To those who say that is unjust, Paul answers: "*What shall we say then? Is God unjust? Not at all! 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 if no one can resist His will, 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, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"*

Many simply fail to understand the God doesn't owe anyone anything. He is no man's debtor. The only thing, that God is under moral obligation to give sinful man is eternal punishment in hell. That is all that God owes man outside of Christ.

➤ [Romans 11:33-34,36](#)

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable His judgments, and His ways past finding out!
"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His
counselor?".....*

*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be
the glory forever! Amen.*

Dr. Harry Ironside gave the illustration of the sinner coming to the door of salvation (John 10:9). Above the door was a sign which says, *"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22:17). The sinner responds to this gracious invitation, trusts Christ and he is gloriously saved.

He now turns around and looks at the door through which he had just entered. He sees above the door another sign which says, *"Chosen...in Him before the foundation of the world"* (Eph. 1:4). Both are true. Both are taught in the Bible. Both must be believed.

Heaven's "train of grace" runs on two tracks. And those on board give all the glory to the Engineer at the wheel!

*Soli Deo
Gloria*