

Text: Selected Scriptures

Title: A Refresher on the Doctrine of Election

Intro: In Ephesians 1:3-15, the Apostle Paul pulls back the veil and shows the rich and unseen truths behind our salvation in Christ. What Ephesians 1 makes clear is that salvation is the work of God—exclusively.

- We must acknowledge that the doctrine of election is a disturbing doctrine for many people.
- Many people find it distasteful that God chooses some and overlooks others.

Regardless of what our objections to this doctrine might be, we must inform our minds and thinking from Scripture.

- We cannot wrestle with these things intellectually as if the answer is found somewhere in our reason.
- We must open the WOG and subject ourselves to what God says about this doctrine. The reality is that our finite minds may never fully grasp this amazing doctrine.

There are some people who think the doctrine of election is foreign to God and the Scripture. Yet, from cover-to-cover, the doctrine appears in God's Word.

In the OT, God chose Abram, Israel, Jacob—he chose prophets, priests, kings—all for His purposes

The doctrine of election is a major NT theme. Jesus consistently taught that salvation is completely the work of God.

- Matt 20:1-16—the parable of the workers in the vineyard—teaches that God is not obligated to treat every person in the same way.
- It is not unjust of God to give *some* more than they are due—“Friend, I am doing you no wrong...Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?”
- Jesus taught that from ancient times, God favored certain persons with His grace while passing others by.
- In Luke 4:25-26, Jesus reminded those Jews in the synagogue that day that God often shows grace where least expected—“But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.”
 - There were many needy widows in Israel during the famine, and yet God chose to send a prophet to minister only to a widow in the land of Sidon—a Gentile woman living in a pagan land.
 - Jesus went further—4:27—“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

- Matt 11:25-26—"At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight."
 - God's 'concealing' and 'revealing' is on the basis of 'His good pleasure'...His sovereign will
- Matt 11:27—"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."
 - God chooses to reveal himself to some and withhold it from others.
 - Matt 13:11—"Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted."
- John 5:21—"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes."

John 13:18—"I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'"

- Jesus selected twelve men to be his apostles but had previously only chosen eleven to salvation.

Prop: For our purposes of study this morning, we want to center our attention around Two areas of thought that will help us grasp a better understanding of this amazing doctrine. The Background and The Basis of the doctrine of election.

1. The Background. What is the theological backdrop of the doctrine of election?

The depravity of man. The Bible teaches us that man is a depraved sinner who inherits the same sin nature of Adam.

The ramifications of man's depravity are severe:

Man is a sinner by nature—See: Rom 3:9-20, 23.

Man is subject to the power of Satan—1 John 5:19—says that the 'whole world lies in the power of the evil one'

Man is helpless to save himself—Rom 5:6—says we were 'helpless' when Christ died for us

Man faces the consequence of sin which is death—Rom 6:23—the 'wages of sin is death'

Man has God as his enemy—James 4:4—says, 'whoever unites with the world makes himself an enemy of God.'

Man is cursed by God under the Law—Gal 3:10—"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."

Man stands condemned and faces eternal separation from the grace of God—2 Thess 1:9—"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

Man's prospects of a right standing before a holy God are nil. There's no 'self-help.' There's no 'self-atonement.' What man needs must come from outside of himself. That is why we say that 'salvation is completely a work of a sovereign God.'

Men throughout the history of the church have risen up against these biblical truths:

Pelagius—in the latter half of the fourth century (360-420), Pelagius, a British layman living in Rome, rose up and denied the doctrines of human inability and human dependence upon divine grace.

- Pelagius taught that man possessed the ability to choose righteousness—that man’s will is free and he can, if he so wishes, live sinlessly.
- Pelagius taught that man *did not inherit Adam’s sin nature*...that before Christ, there *were men who lived sinlessly*.
- Pelagius believed that the grounds of a sinner’s justification was his own merit.
- As a result, Pelagius and his teaching was condemned as heresy at the Council of Ephesus in 431.
- One of Pelagius’ followers, Cassian, who tried to promote a ‘lighter version’ of Pelagianism was also condemned at the Synod of Orange in 529.

In 1508, when Martin Luther discovered the doctrine of justification by faith alone from his intensive study of the Book of Romans and from the teaching of Augustine on Romans, he became convinced that man is justified by faith, apart from any human righteousness. Erasmus—an Augustinian monk who admired Luther and the stand he took against the RC church, turned against Luther and became a bitter rival over the issue of the doctrine of the freedom of the will.

- In 1524, Erasmus wrote a treatise on the ‘Freedom of the Will’
- Luther responded that same year with a treatise of his own: ‘The Bondage of the Will’
- The issue became a question of the ability of man to respond to God—whether one becomes right with God by faith, or by a combination of faith and works.

In the late 1500’s to 1600’s, in response to the teachings of John Calvin, a man named Jacob Arminius was convinced that ‘man was free to choose Christ’ and that ‘God was obligated to dispense His grace freely to all.’

- From November of 1618 to May of 1619, a synod of eighty-four members convened—the result was what became known as the ‘Five Points of Calvinism’

Since that time, many have risen up against the biblical teaching of man’s depravity: Notable is Charles Finney (1792-1875), who wrote in his systematic theology that: “The doctrine of original sin is an anti-scriptural and non-sensical dogma. It is a monstrous and blasphemous dogma that a holy God is angry with any creature for possessing a sinful nature.”

- Finney believed that God’s justice demands that he extend grace equally to all, and that God could not hold mankind guilty for Adam’s disobedience, and that a just God would never condemn people for being sinners by nature.
- Finney believed that all people possess the ability, apart from grace, to choose what is good.
- Finney denied that a holy God would impute people’s sins to Christ or impute Christ’s righteousness to believers.
- Why? Because Finney rejected the clear truth of Scripture for human reason.

In recent years, men like Clark Pinnock have repeated the same heresy and errors of Pelagius and others. Denying the doctrine of total depravity, denying the doctrine of unconditional election, denying an *actual substitutionary atonement* of Christ on the cross, and a rejection of God’s irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints.

So, the battle continues between a ‘God-centered gospel’ and a ‘man-centered gospel’—between theocentrism and anthropocentrism—(this battle is not going away)

When Adam sinned, he cut himself off from the Lord of heaven and forfeited all rights to God’s love and favor.

Man has a ‘free will’ but his will is in bondage to sin. Fallen man always acts consistent with his nature. Man cannot will to change himself. ‘Can a leopard change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin?’ No. Then, ‘neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil’ (Jer 13:23).

John 3:18—says that because of inherent sinfulness, mankind is ‘condemned already’

No one possesses ‘freedom of will’ in the matter of salvation—John 1:12-13—“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Rom 9:16—“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

Some say: ‘That’s not fair’

Responding to that type of thinking, William Perkins, a Puritan, once said, “We must not think that God does a thing because it’s good and right, but rather the thing is good and right because God does it.”

- The Creator owes nothing to the creature who cannot understand his ways, cannot understand his mind, cannot be his counselor.
- How could God ever be called “unjust” for choosing to save some, because there are none who deserve to be saved?
- Salvation has never been about fairness, but about pure grace. Election is rooted in God’s grace.
- And, it seems at times that God is most gracious to those whom grace seems most undeserved.

God is holy, just, and good—man is corrupt, perverse, and sinful, and left to his own will man will follow the course of this world, the god of this world, and do the will of his father, the devil.

God could have left man to die in his sin and would have been totally justified in doing so—God was and is under no obligation to do anything for sinful man. This is the context that the Bible sets forth the doctrine of election.

The doctrine of election states that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam’s race to be the objects of his undeserved favor.¹ These, and only these, He ultimately purposed to save.

¹ David N. Steele, et al, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended and Documented*, 27.

God could have chosen to save everybody (He possesses the power and authority to do so). Or, God could have chosen to save nobody (He possesses the right to judge man and is under no obligation to show mercy to any).

But God did neither of those two options. Instead, God chose to glory Himself by choosing to save some and to exclude others.

The question is: On what basis did God choose???

2. The Basis of election. ‘God’s choice of particular sinners for salvation was *not* based upon any foreseen act, faith, merit, or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on his good pleasure and sovereign will.’²

According to Ephesians 1:4, God’s choice took place in eternity past before anything or anyone existed—“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love”

- God didn’t choose indiscriminately like ‘drawing straws’—he ‘chose for himself’ is what the language of 1:4 implies. God acted totally independent of any outside influence.
- 1:5—“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,”—if God chose based upon anything foreseen, Paul would have been forced to write, ‘He predestined us...according to his foreknowledge of our faith’
- God made his choice solely upon his will and purpose—apart from any human will.
- Faith and good works are the *result*, not the *cause* of God’s choice.
- Eph 2:10—“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”
- Jesus put it plainly in John 15:16—“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain...”
- Good works are the result, not the grounds/basis for predestination.

God’s gracious choice was not based upon foreseen faith—faith is the result and never the cause of God’s choice

- Acts 13:48—“When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
- It is not man’s will, but God’s will that determines which sinners would be shown mercy and be saved
- Ex 33:19—“And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.”

In Deut 7:6—God, of His own free will, chose Israel to be His elect people. Notice: Deut 7:8—“but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”—God’s choice of Israel wasn’t because of anything they did or would ever do, but because God set His electing love upon them.

² Ibid.

Q—Why does God choose one person over another? It cannot be because that person did this or that.

Romans 8:28—"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

- God doesn't look into the future to see what will take place and thus makes His choice. God chooses and decrees what will be and works all things to His determined end.
- All future events take place because God predetermined them to take place.
- God knows the future because He has decreed the future.

Eph 1:11—"also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,"

2 Tim 1:9—"who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,"

James 1:18—"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures."

Some object and say, "God didn't elect specific individuals, but a group or class—in other words, on the cross God made a way instead of saving specific sinners"

The covenant between the Father and the Son

- See: John 17:2, 6, 9, 24— That God the Father gave certain individuals to God the Son was an important concept for the apostle John as he mentions it on multiple occasions.
- See: John 10:22-30—the 'sheep' are those whom the Father specifically has given to the Son.
 - Notice: John 10:26—"But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep." We would have expected Jesus to say: 'You are not my sheep because you do not believe.'—but Jesus said precisely the opposite. A sinner doesn't become a 'sheep' by believing in Jesus; rather, he/she will believe in Jesus because one had already been appointed by God to be one of his sheep.
 - John 6:37—"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."—in other words, they will 'believe and be saved'—Who? All that the Father gives to the Son.
 - Election doesn't exclude human responsibility or the need for each person to respond to the gospel by faith.
 - That seems to conflict in our minds but not in the mind of God.
 - Your faith and your election rests entirely upon God's sovereign choice. Yet, when we came to Christ, we did so willingly. We did nothing against our will.
 - Yet, even our will and desire is directed by God—He even supplies the faith so that we may believe (Eph 2:8).
- The 'Shepherd' died to achieve the salvation of the sheep—John 10:11
- John 10:27—"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them..."—that's an intimate relationship—an intimate love

God the Father chose those whom he would save.

- John 15:19—“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

The verb ‘to choose’ (elect) is used eight times of Jesus choosing disciples and seven times of God’s choice of people for eternal life.

James 2:5—“Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

Man can make no legitimate claim for any part in his redemption. God gets the maximum glory.

One writer: “The privilege of being chosen by God for salvation on the basis of nothing in oneself; of being provided a substitute of such worthiness and honor as the Son of God himself; of receiving the gift of the new birth apart from any works of one’s own; of being united to Christ, declared righteous apart from works, adopted into the family of God, and conformed to his image, progressively on earth and perfectly in heaven—the flood of gracious benefits that man enjoys in salvation tempts the student of Scripture to believe that God’s saving love terminates ultimately on man, Scripture, however, reveals that salvation is not man centered but God centered. God saves sinners for ‘the praise of his glorious grace’ (Eph 1:6).”³

Psalm 106:8—says that God saved Israel out of Egypt, “...for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.”

Isa 48:11—“For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”

Ephesians 1:3-14—the election of the Father (1:4-6), the redemption accomplished by the Son (1:7-12), and the sealing ministry of the Spirit (1:13-14) have all been carried out together as one package ‘to the praise of the glory of his grace’ (1:6), the ‘praise of his glory (1:12), to the’ praise of his glory’ (1:14).

Though man is the recipient of God’s saving love, he is not the ultimate concern of God’s saving grace—God Himself is—and any view of salvation that sees man as God’s chief regard is denigrating the glory of God.

Implications:

Security of salvation—when we come to understand that our salvation is rooted completely in the sovereign purposes of God, we have confidence that it is Him and not us that keeps ourselves in Christ.

Humility before God—no man can boast; God saves based upon his own desire and will to show compassion

Increased Worship—ascribing to God worth that is due his name.

³ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 486.

Prayer: Father, we are stunned that you would choose us to be your children. We are amazed by your gracious salvation, even though we may never fully comprehend it. Help us to accept by faith the truth you have told us in your Word.

Discussion Questions:

1. 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?
2. Explain from Scripture.