SECURITY IN SALVATION:

A biblical look at the doctrine of election.

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There shall be twenty beggars in the street, and I determine to give one of them a shilling; but will any one say that I determined to give that one a shilling, that I elected him to have the shilling, because I foresaw that he would have it? That would be talking nonsense. In like manner, to say that God elected men because He foresaw they would have faith, which is salvation in the germ, would be too absurd for us to listen to for a moment. Faith is the gift of God. Every virtue comes from Him. Therefore, it cannot have caused Him to elect men, because it is His gift.¹

1. Why Study the Doctrine of Election?

1.1 The Analogy of Birth

What choice did you have in the circumstances of your own conception and birth? Were you the one who chose where, when, and how you were brought into this world? Did you choose your gender, race, hair color, eye color, and nationality? "Human resentment arises only when it is indicated that some are more favored than others respecting destiny."²

1.2 The Authority of Scripture

Because we tend to approach the Scripture with preconceived ideas derived from our humanness and our philosophical bent, we need to challenge our thinking with that which is taught by the Word of God. From the start, we must realize that there are things that our finite minds have difficulty in comprehending. We may never, while on earth, be able to fully comprehend all that is involved in the doctrine of divine election.

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Election," in *The New Park Street Pulpit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1963 reprint of 1856 edition), 1:317.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, Tex.: Dallas Seminary Press, 1969 reprint of 1948 edition), 7:133.

1.3 The Attention of Scripture

[1] Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, [2] as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ... [6] I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ... [9] I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. [10] And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. [11] Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. [12] While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ... [24] Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."³

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, [4] just as **He chose** us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, [5] having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, [6] to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.⁴

2. How Should Election Be Defined and Distinguished?

- 2.1 Definitions must be derived from Scripture itself.
 - Election: God chose or selected in eternity those who are to be saved.
 - > Predestination: God predetermined or appointed individuals beforehand to a specific destiny. Cf. Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4, 11.5

⁴ Ephesians 1:3-6.

³ John 17:1, 2, 9-12, 24. All Scripture is cited from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

⁵ "Predestination' refers to God's choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death. 'Election' is the selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination."—Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985), 908.

- Foreknowledge: God chose beforehand or foreordained that a particular action would occur. Foreknowledge is not the equivalent of merely seeing or having knowledge of an action before it actually occurs. Foreknowledge is actively causing something to happen—it is an action, not knowledge. Cf. Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 1:1-2.
- ➤ Called: God chose someone for salvation. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; Romans 8:28, 30; 9:23-24. Such a calling is effectual—it always results in salvation.
- **2.2** God's will is directly involved in His selection or election of individuals for salvation.
 - ➤ God chose us for salvation "according to *His* purpose" (Romans 8:28).
 - being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).
 - 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 given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Timothy 1:9).

In the NT two different families of Greek words were employed by the writers in order to express the concept of "will" (the mental ability to either decide upon or to desire something). The Greek verb qe,lw [thelo] and the related noun qe,lhma [thelema] refer to "desirous will." The verb bou,lomai [boulomai] and its related noun boulh, [boule] involve the concept of "determinative will." The perfect illustration of the distinction between these two terms is Matthew 1:19 ("And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling [mh. qe,lwn] to put her to shame, resolved [evboulh,qh] to divorce her quietly"⁶).

- ➤ God "desires [qe,lei] all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4) does not have the same meaning as "determines that all men are to be saved." God's desire and His determination are two different things. This verse does not support the unbiblical doctrine of universalism (i.e. that all people will eventually be saved).
- ➤ "In the exercise of His will [boulhqei.j] He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures" (James 1:18). In other words, God "determines" who is to be born again by His Word.

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⁶ English Standard Version (ESV).

3. What Is the Necessity for Divine Election?

3.1 Scripture teaches that fallen humanity is totally deprayed and unable to change their sinful condition.

A Brief Outline of the Epistle to the Romans

- **I.** Introduction (1:1-17)
- II. The Need for Righteousness Because of Universal Sin (1:18—3:20)
 - A. Condemnation of the Gentiles (1:18-32)
 - B. Condemnation of the Jews (2:1—3:8)
 - C. Condemnation of the Whole World (3:9-20)
- III. The Righteousness of God in Justification by Faith (3:21—5:21)
- IV. The Righteousness of God in Sanctification (6:1—8:39)
- V. The Righteousness of God in His Dealings with Israel (9:1—11:36)
- VI. The Righteousness of God in the Daily Life of Believers (12:1—15:13)
- VII. Conclusion (15:14—16:27)
- ➤ Because of inherent sinfulness, mankind is condemned already (John 3:18, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God").
- Everyone is afflicted with spiritual inability (Romans 3:9-11, "What then? Are we better *than they?* Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God'")

Original sin deals with our depravity. Inability deals with the fact that our own depravity is humanly irremediable. Man is totally unable to change or act in a way that is different from it....

Inability does not mean the loss of natural liberty. This refers to free agency, namely, that man exercises volition according to his character. Inability presupposes liberty....

... inability means that in sin man is not only indisposed and made opposite to all good but that he is totally unable to be otherwise. It is inability to discern, love, or choose the things that are well pleasing to God. He cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned; he cannot love them because his mind is enmity against God; he cannot choose them because those in the flesh cannot please God.⁷

⁷ John Murray, "Inability," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:83-84 (emphasis added).

- 3.2 No one inherently desires to believe the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. No one is naturally willing to come to God—God must draw him or her to Himself (John 6:37, 44, 65).
- 3.3 No one possesses freedom of will in the matter of salvation (John 1:13; Romans 9:16).

Said a deeply taught servant of God, "Man is impotent as to his will. He has no will favorable to God. I believe in free will; but then it is *a will only free to act according to nature* (italics ours). A dove has no will to eat carrion; a raven no will to eat the clean food of the dove. Put the nature of the dove into the raven and it will eat the food of a dove. Satan could have no will for holiness. We speak it with reverence, God could have no will for evil. The sinner in his sinful nature could never have a will according to God. For this he must be born again" (J. Denham Smith). This is just what we have contended ... —the will is regulated by the nature. 8

3.4 Additional biblical support: Jeremiah 13:23; Matthew 7:17-18; 12:33-35; Romans 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3.

A majority of professing evangelicals agree with the statement that human beings are basically good, a clear repudiation of the biblical view of human fallenness. The irony here is that while we decry the baleful influence of secular humanism on the culture, we are busy adopting secular humanism's view of man. It is not so much that the secular culture has negotiated away the doctrine of original sin, as that the evangelical church has done so.⁹

4. What Are the Results of Divine Election?

- **4.1** Faith is a gift from God. Man's faith does not secure his election; God's election guarantees man's faith.
 - ➤ Philippians 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 ..."
 - ➤ Romans 10:17 "So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

⁸ Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1975 reprint of 1930 edition). 171-72.

⁹ R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), 20.

- ➤ Ephesians 2:8-9 "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."
- 4.2 In its means and in its application, salvation is God's work and His work alone. There is no synergism (i.e. God and man working together for salvation).
 - ➤ John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you ..."
 - ➤ Acts 13:48 "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."
 - ➤ John 15:16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you ..."

- **4.3** The Holy Spirit illumines (gives ability to understand the gospel) in such a manner that the individual exercises God-given faith. ¹⁰
 - ➤ Romans 8:30 "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."
 - Acts 16:14 "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul."
 - ➤ 1 Corinthians 2:14 "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."

¹⁰ Cf. Erickson, Christian Theology, 931.

No one here who sent himself here. No one here whom God did not send here.

HEAVEN

HELL

No one here who did not send himself here. No one here whom God sent here.

Recommended Reading

(starting with the most recent)

- R. C. Sproul. *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997.
- R. C. Sproul. *Chosen by God.* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986.
- Edwin H. Palmer. *The Five Points of Calvinism: A Study Guide*, enlarged edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1980.
- Arthur W. Pink. *The Sovereignty of God.* Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1981 reprint of 1930 edition.

Books with an Unacceptable View of Election

(starting with the most recent)

Norman Geisler. *Chosen But Free*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1999. William W. Klein. *The Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books/Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

Samuel Fisk. *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1981 reprint of 1973 edition.

Subject outline for "Election" in John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Topical Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1999), 369-71:

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Of Christ, as Messiah. (Isaiah 42:1; 1 Peter 2:6)
Of good angels. (1 Timothy 5:21)
Of Israel. (Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 45:5)
Of ministers. (Luke 6:13; Acts 9:15)
Of churches. (1 Peter 5:13)
Of believers is
        By God. (1 Thessalonians 1:4; Titus 1:1)
        By Christ. (John 13:18; 15:16)
        In Christ. (Ephesians 1:4)
        Personal. (Matthew 20:16; John 6:44; Acts 22:14; 2 John 13)
        According to the purpose of God. (Romans 9:11; Ephesians 1:11)
        According to the foreknowledge of God. (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2)
        Eternal. (Ephesians 1:4)
        Sovereign. (Romans 9:15-16; 1 Corinthians 1:27; Ephesians 1:11)
         Without regard to any human merit. (Romans 9:11)
        Of grace. (Romans 11:5)
        Recorded in heaven. (Luke 10:20)
        For the glory of God. (Ephesians 1:6)
        Through sanctification of the Spirit and faith. (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2)
        To adoption. (Ephesians 1:5)
        To salvation. (2 Thessalonians 2:13)
        To conformity with Christ. (Romans 8:29)
        To good works. (Ephesians 2:10)
        To spiritual warfare. (2 Timothy 2:4)
        To eternal glory. (Romans 9:23)
Ensures to believers
        Effectual calling. (Romans 8:30)
        Divine teaching. (John 17:6)
        Belief in Christ. (Acts 13:48)
        Acceptance with God. (Romans 11:7)
        Protection. (Mark 13:20)
         Vindication of their wrongs. (Luke 18:7)
         Working of all things for good. (Romans 8:28)
        Blessedness. (Psalms 33:12; 65:4)
        The inheritance. (Isaiah 65:9; 1 Peter 1:4-5)
Should lead to cultivation of graces. (Colossians 3:12)
Should be evidenced by diligence. (2 Peter 1:10)
Saints may have assurance of. (1 Thessalonians 1:4)
Exemplified in
        Isaac. (Genesis 21:12)
        Abraham. (Nehemiah 9:7)
        Zerubbabel. (Haggai 2:23)
        The apostles. (John 13:18; 15:19)
        Jacob. (Romans 9:12-13)
        Rufus. (Romans 16:13)
        Paul. (Galatians 1:15)
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