

Election

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper www.valleybible.net

The doctrine of election teaches that God sovereignly chose before creation those whom He desired to be saved. This is a difficult doctrine for people to embrace because it appears to conflict with our responsibility to receive Christ. Because our experience was that we chose to believe in God, it is typically difficult to accept that God unconditionally chose us from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). The fact that many churches oppose the doctrine of election does not help its acceptance.

As we investigate this doctrinal issue, we must remember that God's Word is the final authority on what is true. Also, since God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9) we cannot demand that God make truth completely understandable to us. We must be willing to accept what God says even if it contradicts our belief system.

The Bible teaches election

The teaching of the Bible is that God did not merely plan to give salvation to those who would choose to believe, but rather that He actually determined beforehand those who would be chosen for salvation (Matthew 22:14; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28-30; Romans 9:7-24; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9). In other words, we respond in faith to God's choice of us and His election of us is not based upon anything we do.

In order to accept this, certain other biblical truths must be understood:

Election must be seen in light of man's sin. In ourselves we are sinful and therefore are totally incapable of having a relationship with God (John 6:35-44; Romans 3:10-23; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19). Sin has affected our mind and we cannot receive the things of God (Romans 1:18-21; 3:10-11; 1 Corinthians 2:14). Sin has affected our emotions and our heart is set against God (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:26-27). Sin has affected our will and we are enslaved to sin (Romans 8:7-8).

Election must be seen from God's perspective rather than man's perspective. God has the right to be more gracious to some than to others (Matthew 20:1-15; Romans 9:14-24). Also, God has been more gracious to some than to others in the past (Psalm 147:20; Romans 3:1-2; John 15:16; Acts 9:15). God does not owe us anything in order to be just (Romans 9:6-24). Salvation is entirely the result of God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Therefore, unless God graciously takes the initiative on our behalf to save us from our sin, we will be in rebellion and destined for destruction. Salvation is totally the work of God and even our faith is God's gift to us (Ephesians 2:8-9). He has chosen us from the beginning for salvation (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

How the Bible teaches election

Election is taught to assure us of God's faithfulness (Romans 8:28-30). God will complete the process of salvation (Philippians 1:6).

Election is taught so that we would praise God (Ephesians 1:5-6; 12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Election is taught so that we would be encouraged in evangelism (2 Timothy 2:10). We know that God has appointed some to believe and if we are faithful there will be some responsiveness in certain people (cf. Acts 18:10).

Answers to objections regarding election

"Election is God knowing who would choose to believe and then electing them."

There is no doubt that God is omniscient and knows everything (1 John 3:20). But election is not based on God's foreknowledge of our faith for several reasons:

The Bible does not speak of our faith as a reason that God chose us. Indeed, it excludes it (Romans 9:11-13; 11:5-6; 2 Timothy 1:9). Election based on something good in us, like our faith, would be essentially the beginning of salvation by our worthiness.

Passages that speak about God's foreknowledge are concerning His foreknowledge of people, not His foreknowledge of facts about people. God is all-knowing about all facts, past and future. But when the word "foreknowledge" is used it is used to mean God's selection of us in love; involving a personal and relational knowledge (cf. Acts 2:23; Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:2).

Ultimately, this is not election, or a choice by God, but rather it is man's choice and God simply knowing about it in advance.

"Election means we do not have a choice of whether to accept Christ or not."

Man clearly has a choice in salvation since God holds us accountable when we refuse to believe. Yet all people, apart from election, freely and willingly choose to turn away from God (Romans 3:10-18). The unsaved are dead in their trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1) and are slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). They express a free choice that leads them toward active rebellion to God, not faith in God.

"How can God hold us responsible for not believing when He did not elect us?"

This confuses our freedom with our ability. These are not identical and someone can be free to choose if they wish but unable to change their natural direction because of their desires. If God does not elect us we will willingly remain in our state of rebellion forever. This is the result of our sinful nature for which we are rightly accountable. Also, when people rejected Jesus, He attributed their willful choice to the decree of God the Father (cf. John 8:43-44; Matthew 23:37; Romans 1:20).

Finally, Paul answered this objection in Romans 9:19-21 when he observes that the Creator has a right to do what He wills with His creation.

“The Bible says that it is God’s will to save everyone.”

1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 are usually cited as support for God’s desire to save all men. If God desires to save all men then how could He only elect some? The answer to this lies in how we understand what is meant by God’s will or desire. It certainly does not mean that everyone will be saved. Also, God certainly has the power, if He chooses, to save everyone. Therefore, we must conclude that God’s desire for all to be saved is limited by something else, or else all would be saved.

To say that God limits himself according to the will of man leaves man in an exalted position. Those who believe can then consider themselves as having achieved something and can boast (cf. Ephesians 2:9). It is far better to understand that God’s desire for all to be saved is limited by reasons related to God’s glory. Romans 9 teaches that God is merciful to some based on his own prerogatives as the Creator.

Conclusion

The reason the doctrine of election is prominent in the New Testament is because it is important for our maturity in Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17). As we understand God’s grace more fully, we will respond in thankfulness for His goodness toward us by obeying Him.

The ultimate question of why God chose some for salvation and left others in their sinful state is one that we, with our finite knowledge, cannot answer.

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