

The Election of God

(by Bob Pulliam)

Sounds a little like a political process, and yet it is a subject spoken of in the Bible. It is not God's being elected to a position. It is God's election of those who are saved. For example:

"Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;" (II Peter 1:10)

The word "election" may confuse some, and so it might be beneficial for us to briefly consider it's meaning (we will consider the words "chose" and "predestinated" toward the end of this article, and look at what a creed says about them). It is not a balloting process that goes on in heaven. It actually corresponds to the use of the word "elect". It refers to being chosen, or "picked out". It is used of Christ, angels, and of us as believers (or, the saved).

No Bible believer questions the fact that we are chosen or elected. One would have to deny the scriptures, and thus deny his faith in the Bible. The question that must arise is, "how are we elected, or chosen, unto salvation?" It is not enough to assume that God picks us out of a multi-millennial line-up, and determines salvation by personal selection. God, in His infinite wisdom, could do the selecting in any number of ways. It is not reasonable for us to decide what He actually did simply by considering what seems logical to us. We must consider what God has revealed about the matter, and put it into the overall picture of salvation.

A Preconceived Notion is Missing...

Some conclude that God must elect people to salvation unconditionally, because people are too depraved to meet any conditions. Elsewhere (see [Inherited Sins](#)) we found that the doctrine of "original sin" is patently false. This doctrine teaches that we all inherit the sins of Adam, and are born so depraved that we cannot hear the call of God. The Bible teaches that infants are born pure and innocent, and need no salvation because they have not sinned.

If we take away the preconceived notion that man cannot meet conditions for salvation, we might expect the Bible to speak of conditions for salvation (or election). And, sure enough, they are there in abundance.

Conditional Salvation...

On several occasions in the New Testament people asked what they needed to do to be saved. The doctrine of unconditional election would demand the answer "nothing". But this is not the answer offered. In Acts 2:37, the multitude cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter could have answered, "There's nothing to do, God has already done it all"; but he did not! Instead, Peter told this multitude to repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins". They wanted to know what to do to be saved, and Peter told them! Their election (or salvation) was conditioned upon something. Such was in accord with what Jesus had said in Mark 16:16: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Even believing is a condition. Such is produced in a hearing and evaluating of the word (Rom 10:17).

Paul asked the Lord what he was to do (Acts 22:10). The Lord told him to go into Damascus and wait for word. Ananias was sent, and Paul was told to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). If he still had sins, then he was not yet saved. The election process involved his coming into compliance with the conditions set forth by God. When the conditions are met, the individual is elect. The selection of God is of those who come to Christ, whoever they may be!

The jailor in Acts 16 also asked what he needed to do. Paul did not say "nothing". Paul told him to believe on the Lord, and then he was immediately baptized.

Definitions and Applications...

The word "chose" in Ephesians 1:4 means, "to pick out, select,... to choose for oneself". (Vines) How would God make the choice?... Through His Son! As we are "in Him" so are we chosen by God, for Jesus is the choice stone from God. God chose Jesus in the Beginning, and we are a part of that choice when we are "in Him".

The word "predestined" in Ephesians 1:5 comes from two words meaning beforehand, and to set a boundary. Thus, predestine means "to set a boundary ahead of time." But what boundary did God set beforehand? Was it the fixed number of individuals who would be saved? Paul gives us the answer. He predestined us "by Jesus Christ". Jesus was the boundary set out beforehand, and as we step into that boundary, we are predestinated to salvation. Is this not why Paul could write, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (II Cor 5:17)? It is in Christ that we become new creatures. It is in Christ that we have salvation. It is in Christ that we are chosen and predestined. And the only way into Christ is denied by the professors of the creed before us. Denied because it involves the free-will and choice of man. Simply put, one gets into Christ only by obedience to the conditions set forth by God. The point at which one actually gets *into* Christ is baptism in water for the remission of sins (Gal 3:26 & 27; Rom 6:3 & 4).

This is not what much of the religious world teaches. Although many of the members of denominations may not be aware of the ins and outs of this theology, their church is very adamant that these things be confessed for membership. Note what the Philadelphia Confession of Faith has to say on this:

"3. By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated or foreordained to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation..."

"4. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished."

"5. Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love; without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto." (Article III, No's 3 - 5)

The summation of this is that God foreknew each individual who would walk this earth and decided whether He would or would not save each one. But is this what passages like Eph 1:4 & 5 have in mind? The first fallacy we find in this doctrine is that it fully contradicts clear teaching in other Bible passages. The Bible teaches that God is not a respecter of

persons. He shows no favoritism, or partiality. Peter said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." (Acts 10:34 & 35) Perhaps Peter was not speaking of matters relating to salvation. Yet when we read the context, we find that to be exactly the subject at hand; the salvation of the gentiles without circumcision. God does not pick and choose at random for man's salvation. God has a just and righteous way to choose those who will be saved. (see also Gal 2:6)

The authors of the above creed included the phrase "in Christ" several times; but it's significance is never called forth. Why didn't they elaborate? Perhaps they never considered the significance of this simple little phrase. It tells us how God chose and predestinated! It is not a random choice of individuals by God in the beginning. Rather, a criteria (or test) for choosing those who would be saved. What is that criteria?... In Christ! "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4) This is reinforced as Paul goes on to write, "having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph 1:5). How did God predestine us to adoption? By choosing us at random?... No!... By Jesus Christ! Jesus is the stone that was rejected by men, but chosen by God (I Pt 2:4). Through our choice of God's stone, we are chosen of God (I Pt 2:6). Paul revealed why some were lost and some were saved in his generation. Because God had chosen some, and not chosen others?... No!... Because of their rejection or acceptance of the testing stone set up by God (Rom 9:30 - 33). The same stone to which Peter refers. As we noted the word "predestinated"; Jesus Christ is the boundary established by God. All who will cross that boundary, entering Christ, are saved. How do we cross that boundary? As God specified.

The Bible speaks of baptism as the means of getting into Christ (Rom 6:3f; Gal 3:26f). In Christ is where all spiritual blessings are found, and where we are chosen (or elected). Paul told the Ephesians:

"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, 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," (Ephesians 1:3f)

God did not select us individually before the creation. God "chose us in Him". Jesus Christ is the testing stone on which every soul is judged. God ordained that all who come to His Son would be elect, or selected.

Is It in the Bible?...

Consider for a moment what is being said by those who believe God must save people unconditionally by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on their heart:

His Spirit must act on their hearts.
It must be done irrespective of their action.
They are, then, saved the moment they believe.

In light of this, consider what we find in the scriptures. In Acts 2 we find a multitude who obviously believe (v37). They then ask what they must do. But if the Spirit has already saved them by giving them faith, Peter must tell them so. They want to know what to do to be saved (remember that they are "pricked in their hearts"). Peter does not tell them they are already saved. Instead he tells them to do something. No wonder some Calvinistic thinkers tell us Peter made a mistake. It totally tears their doctrine apart.

Paul had already seen the light on the road, and had asked the Lord what he needed to do. He obviously believed. Many think he was saved at this point. God, however, sent Ananias to tell him what to do to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). He had believed, but he was not yet saved (still had his sins).

Stranger yet is the fact that those people were not getting this "better felt than told" feeling that we hear about today. People today have been deceived into believing that salvation is the result of a feeling that God gives one (actually, the feeling is the result of the salvation). Many tell us that they know they are saved because they can feel it. I do not doubt that they feel something. But so do all kinds of cult members and pagans. When we look at the Bible, not one of those people knew they were saved at the point of faith, or some better felt than told feeling or experience. The Holy Spirit did not tell them any such thing. The difference between the salvation of people in the scriptures, and the feeling people have today, is the false doctrine being taught today. It produces the feeling that deceives one into believing a lie (see Prov 14:12).

Conclusion...

We have seen that the election of God occurs in Christ Jesus. It is not an individual election process which would show a respect of persons on God's part (Gal 2:6; Acts 10:34f). God has chosen us in Christ Jesus. "...in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." (ibid.) The way one gets into Christ requires submission to conditions set by God.

"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him," (Heb 5:9)