

The Church of the Servant King
Soteriology Series

SO_6_Predestination & Election –
Part 11 – Some Questions and Issues Concerning the Doctrine of Election – Lesson 2

Introduction

In our previous lesson (Part 11 – Questions and Issues – Lesson 1), we began the process of examining some questions that are frequently posed regarding the doctrine of election. We will not be able to examine all of the questions surrounding this doctrine; however, the questions I've selected to address are those that may help us gain greater depth of understanding of this widely debated topic. Here are the questions we've addressed to date:

Question/Issue: If one believes that God foreknew from eternity past those who would believe and thereby made His decision to place those who so believed in the body of the elect, isn't that person contending that God's actions are made contingent upon the actions of man?

Question/Issue: Your view of election seems to indicate that man can produce a work (i.e. faith or the will) worthy of God's approval.

Question/Issue: Doesn't the fact that there is variety in all of God's creation (e.g. classifications among the angels, different races of mankind, variations of the estates into which men are born, etc.) indicate that election is a doctrine that hinges upon the sovereignty of God?

In today's lesson, we'll continue to examine several other questions along these lines and thereby reinforce the doctrine that we've studied in Part 10 of this series. Please see the notes entitled [**SO_6_Predestination and Election – Part 10 – Introduction to the Doctrine of Election.**](#)

Question/Issue: Your view of election seems to imply that God's election is conditional versus an unconditional provision.

Response: We need to make a distinction between conditions surrounding God's giving salvation (i.e. the unconditional provision) and man's receipt of salvation (i.e. the conditional acceptance based upon the exercise of man's volition). The question/issue as posed confuses the basis of election (i.e. conditional based upon God's foreknowledge of who would choose to receive the gift) with the unconditional provision of the gift (i.e. salvation).

We probably need to examine this issue a bit further by exploring the subject of *unconditional election* from the standpoint of the Calvinist definition. The second premise of extreme Calvinistic thought is captured by the phrase unconditional election, the "U" in TULIP. By this, the extreme Calvinist means that there are no conditions for God's electing some to salvation OR for God's giving it or for our receiving it.¹ Let's examine some of the texts that the extreme Calvinist attempts to use to support their view.

Ephesians 1:5-11 – "Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the good pleasure of His will**, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of **His will, according to His good pleasure** which **He purposed** in Himself,

¹ If one adopts this position, then it is easy to see that it is only a small logical step to conclude that the gift of Ephesians 2:8 is the gift of faith. When faith is a gift given unconditionally only to the elect, then faith is really not a condition for salvation at all. Thus, not only is salvation provided unconditionally, but the receipt of salvation is unconditional.

that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, **being predestined according to the purpose of Him** who works all things **according to the counsel of His will**.

Things to note: 1) There is an implicit emphasis upon the sovereignty of God; 2) there is an implicit view of the term “predestination” that equates “predestination” with sovereign choice or predetermination apart from man’s volition or God’s omniscience; 3) this passage needs to be synthesized with an understanding of God’s omniscience, the purpose of human history, and other passages that clearly teach that man has free will; 4) this passage needs to be synthesized with the teaching provided by other passages such as Romans 8:29-30 which define predestination as a predetermination by God that believers be conformed to the image of Christ; 5) there needs to be a distinction between the gift of salvation which is unconditional and the receipt of salvation which is conditioned upon faith (i.e. “justified by faith” – Ro 5:1; “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” to be saved – Acts 16:31).

Romans 8:28-30 – And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the **called according to His purpose**. **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover **whom He predestined, these He also called**; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Things to note: 1) The extreme Calvinist emphasizes the phrases that tend to support his view of God’s sovereignty without a satisfactory synthesis with other concepts such as man’s free will, God’s omniscience, and God’s purpose in human history (i.e. the Angelic Conflict); 2) most moderate Calvinists believe that God’s decision to elect is unconditional from God’s point of view (i.e. election is seen as unconditional, there is nothing outside of God that prompted Him to elect); 3) the question is not whether there are conditions surrounding the provision, but whether there are any conditions for the receipt; 4) the next verse (v. 29) as well as other passages (e.g. 1 Pe 1:2) indicate that the elect have been chosen *according to the foreknowledge* of God the Father thereby confirming the unconditional decision by God to elect; 5) the moderate Calvinist would indicate that election is not dependent upon foreknowledge (i.e. conditional), rather election is in accordance with foreknowledge (thereby unconditional)²; 6) foreknowledge does not equate to election.

Another moderate Calvinist view: I would propose the following view of *unconditional election*. God’s decision to elect some to eternal salvation and make election a part of His eternal decree was not conditioned upon any outside factor. In that sense, election is unconditional. However, the basis for a man becoming one of the elect is conditioned upon the receipt of the gift of salvation through faith. This is where the extreme Calvinist and some moderate Calvinists part paths with others. Extreme Calvinists and some moderate Calvinists view faith as the gift, therefore election is not conditioned upon the faith of the recipient. This is rather bizarre logic to say the least.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 – But **God has chosen** the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and **God has chosen** the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that **no flesh should glory in His presence**.

² Norman Geisler, *Chosen, But Free* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 68.

Things to note: 1) Neither this nor any other passage of Scripture affirms that faith is not a necessary condition for receiving God's gift of salvation; 2) to the contrary, many passages affirm that faith is a condition to receive the gift of salvation (e.g. Jn 3:16; Acts 16:31; Ro 5:1); 3) it is erroneous to conclude that faith or trust equates to a basis for boasting; 4) as a condition of salvation, faith is opposed to works and works are opposed to faith; 5) salvation is an unconditional gift provision from God even though receiving it is conditioned on an act of faith on our part.

John 15:16 – You did not choose me, but *I chose you* ...

Things to note: 1) The context favors this as a reference to the Twelve to be His disciples (and apostles to Israel), not God's choice of the elect to eternal salvation; 2) sometimes the word "chosen" is used to refer to those who are not of the elect, e.g. Judas was "chosen" by Jesus, but was not one of the elect (Jn 6:70 – Have I not chosen you, yet one of you is a devil).

2 Thessalonians 2:13 – But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God *from the beginning chose you for salvation* through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

Things to note: 1) There is no disagreement that the elect are chosen by God; 2) the extreme Calvinist neglects to note that the very verses that they quote declares that salvation comes to us through "belief in the truth."

Conclusion

The error of extreme Calvinism regarding "unconditional election" is the failure to adhere to an election that is unconditional from the standpoint of the giver (God), but which has one condition from the standpoint of the recipient – faith.³ This in turn is based upon the mistaken notion that faith is a gift only to the elect and that the elect have no choice in receiving it. The value of such an analysis as this is that the basis of the views held by the extreme Calvinist is brought into serious question. As a result, our own position is clarified.

³ Ibid., 73.