

Reformation Theology: Unconditional Election

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Definition: God's decision to save someone does not ultimately depend on anything in that person.

1. Concerned with God's choice, not ours.
2. Concerned with God's choice for salvation, not how someone will serve in the church.
3. Concerned with God's choice of individuals as opposed to groups.
4. States that God's choice of individuals for salvation does not depend on anything in those individuals. **including foreseen faith, good works, etc. i.e. the basis for salvation lies in the will of God alone.**

***See Westminster Confession of Faith- Chapter 3**

The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.” (3.8) **Can be easily misunderstood and misapplied. When understood properly it should give us all the qualities mentioned.**

Implications

1. God's election is not based on foreseen faith, repentance, perseverance or good works. **These would all be conditional election. These undermine divine sovereignty, and undermine the doctrine of salvation by grace alone as they would provide some occasion to boast. God chose me because he foresaw that I would have faith, persevere, etc.**
2. We choose God because God first chose us -or- we believe because we were chosen. **It's not I was elected because I selected but the other way around. Our faith depends on our election.**
3. Even faith and repentance are free gifts of God; works of supernatural grace in us.
 - a. Regeneration (being "born again") must precede conversion.
 - b. We cannot take any credit for any part of our salvation.

4. God also ultimately determines that some sinners will not be saved.

a. We should acknowledge divine reprobation as well as divine election.

It follows that if he selected some, he did not select others and therefore some are not saved. It is right and appropriate that we are grieved than this. But we should never think that somehow we are more compassionate than God who gave his own son in order that many would be saved.

Misunderstandings:

1. God chooses arbitrarily or capriciously who gets saved and who doesn't.

It is according to his will and wisdom, it isn't that there is no reason, just that the reason doesn't come from something in the elect. Saying that there is nothing in me that made God choose me doesn't mean there wasn't a reason, just that the reason isn't in me.

2. Salvation isn't conditional on anything, including faith, repentance, or good works.

Not conditional on anything in us. The conditions rely on God and God alone.

3. God forces people to be saved (or damned) regardless of what they actually want.

Those who all elected and regeneration actually want salvation, God saves through the will, not against them. Those left in sin don't want God and desire to reject him. It is not the case that people go kicking and screaming on their way to hell wishing they were Christians.

Scriptural Support:

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

God didn't choose Israel because of anything praiseworthy in them. He didn't love them because they were lovely, instead he set his love on them in a merciful and gracious way. God's love is active rather than reactive.

John 10:24-29

Not that some have more evidence, have more access, the reason some believe and others don't is in the Father giving and drawing them. It's in the work of God. The reason they don't believe is that

they are not part of the flock. Not, you aren't part of my flock because you don't believe. You don't become part of the flock by believing, you believe because you have been made part of the flock.

Acts 11:18; 13:48

Repentance is a gift; God has granted it to the Gentiles. We see the appointing preceding the belief.

Romans 9:1-24

1. Paul is concerned with election to salvation, not service or temporal blessings. (he speaks of his own damnation and the whole subject line has been salvation). 2 Individual election is the focus, he illustrates his points with individuals. 3. Paul's understanding is that the election is unconditional (11-12), not on the basis of anything in the twins, revisited in 15-18, I will have mercy on whom I will, purely God's choice, exact statement in verse 16. 4. It involves both election and reprobation (ex. Pharaoh, Esau). 5. Whatever view Paul holds, must naturally invite the objections of verses 14 and 19. If your doctrine of election doesn't bring up these objections then your view isn't the same as Paul's.

Additional Scriptures:

Genesis 25:23 (cf. Malachi 1:2-3); John 3:3; John 6:37, 44, 64-65; John 17:12; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-14; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:1

Summary Argument/ Theological Basis:

1. Salvation is by grace alone (Sola Gratia).
2. Therefore, there can be no ground for boasting in our salvation. (1 Cor 1:28-29)
3. Therefore, even our faith and repentance must be free gifts of God.
4. Therefore, whether or not we are saved must depend ultimately on God alone.

Objections:

1. God doesn't show partiality (Romans 2:11) He is no respecter of persons.

If election is unconditional then God is playing favorites. It is very obvious from the Bible that God doesn't treat everyone the same, he does discriminate. I was born into an affluent society others are born in third world countries. The context talks about whether condemnation is restricted to one people group. God doesn't show partiality between different groups of people. Regarding justice God judges each equally. But in election we aren't dealing with God's justice but his mercy.

2. If God ultimately decides who is saved, evangelism is a waste of time.

A. This confuses Calvinism with Fatalism. God foreordains the ends and the means to them. Take a hole in one for example. If God foreordained the hole in one should you not bother to hit it. God ordaining someone to salvation makes the evangelist an essential part of God's plan for that person to hear the gospel.

Spurgeon "That is why we preach. If there are so many fish to be taken into the net, I will go and catch some of them. Because many are foreordained to be caught, I will spread my nets with eager anticipation. I never could see why that would repress our zealous efforts it seems to me to be the very thing that should awaken us with energy. That God has a people and that these people shall be brought in.

Packer "So far from making evangelism pointless, the sovereignty of God in grace is the one thing that prevents evangelism from being pointless. For it creates the possibility, indeed the certainty that evangelism will be fruitful. Apart from it there is not even a possibility of evangelism being fruitful. Were it not for the sovereign grace of God evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel.

3. It is unjust for God to condemn people to hell before they are even born.

Real objection is that the reason people aren't saved lies in the will of God and not in the free will of people. Could respond with Romans 9 "who are you o man..." Election and reprobation don't need to be seen as symmetrical. Most reformed theologians say they are asymmetrical. (supralapsarians vs infralapsarians) Intra-Westminster standards God when he decrees election he doesn't consider people as morally neutral, he considers each person as a fallen human being which justly deserves punishment. So he either chooses freely to apply Christ's sacrifice to them or to pass over them.

4. John 3:16 clearly teaches that God loves the world and wants all to be saved.

Have to ask how John is using the word "world" or kosmos. Some have argued it means the elect...which is a terrible idea. It is however true that this word rarely ever refers to every single person that has ever lived. Most often, especially in John's writings, it means the fallen cosmos/creation in rebellion against God, especially humanity. Look how the word is used in verse 17. The emphasis is on the depth or magnitude of God's love, not the numerical extent of the recipients of salvation. John wants us to be amazed that God loved a fallen world and that he loved it enough to give up his own son. In the end, this passage isn't really about election.

5. John 3:16 clearly teaches that anyone who wants eternal life can have it.

The Calvinist actually agrees with this. The issue is that fallen human beings don't want it and so it requires a supernatural work of the Spirit to regenerate them before they will ever want it. v 19,20 tell us clearly that people don't want it.

6. 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 clearly stat that God wants everyone to be saved.

A. Appear problematic on the surface. 1. Neither are directly addressing the doctrine of election.

In the Timothy passage, when it says “all” means all without distinction (all kinds of people) rather than all without exception. This is clearly the way the word is used just 3 verses earlier when Paul says, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,” unless we are assuming Paul to be telling us that we should pray for every living person on the planet. Could also say that this is the difference between God’s preceptive will and his decretive will.

2 Peter passage- The any and all may refer back to the “you” in the previous clause.

Calvinists don’t deny that God wants all to be saved. We simply make the distinction between God’s will of precept and will of decree. God does desire all to do well, he does not take delight in people disobeying him. Yet he has not elected all.

7. If our election ultimately depends only on God’s secret will, we can never have assurance of our salvation.

This seems to be saying we can never be sure as to whether God has elected us or not.

But this misunderstands the idea of God’s secret will. Once God’s decree comes to pass it isn’t a secret anymore. In the Calvinist view, the elect are those who have come to saving faith in Christ. If I have a genuine saving faith then I am elect. How do I know? The Bible gives us ways to see evidence for these things. Do I believe the truths of the gospel. Do I love Christ? When I hear the gospel, does it thrill my heart? Do I love God’s people? Do I have fruit- love for others, good works? Have God’s people confirmed my faith? The big difference between the Calvinist and Arminian is that if I have a genuine saving faith today then I am elect and will have a genuine saving faith on the day I die. On the

Arminian view, that is not a given, I may fall away and therefore have no basis for assurance because I rest on human will rather than the infallible will of God.

Importance to the Christian Life

A. UE exalts the sovereignty of God in all things.

If God isn't sovereign in salvation, which is the most important issue from the human perspective, then his sovereignty in other areas doesn't count for much. If we can be confident in his sovereignty in salvation, we have reason to be confident in his sovereignty in all things. We must affirm God's sovereignty if we are to have meaningful hope. If there is anything in the universe that God is not in absolute control of, then we can never be certain that he is able to keep his promises.

B. UE reassures us that God's redemptive purposes never fail.

Scripture puts great emphasis on the fact that God's purposes never fail. Is it the case that God's purpose and desire is to save all but he doesn't pull it off because humans in their free will don't cooperate. Or is it the case that God's ultimate purpose is to save some out of his free grace and mercy and to pass over others in a display of his justice and that is exactly what happens? If his purposes never fail, it must be the later.

C. UE reinforces the gospel truth that we are saved by grace from start to finish.

No ground for boasting.

D. UE reassures us that our salvation ultimately depends on God's love for us, not on our love for God.

This is a much safer place to be, is it not? If it is conditional on my love for God and depends on a faith that has its origin in me, then experience shows me that I have much to be concerned about. If it rests in God I have a firm basis for assurance.

E. UE encourages us to give thanks for God for everything—even for our very faith in him.

Ephesians 1:15-16 for this reason because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints. Paul thanks God for faith of others.

F. UE keeps us humble.

Reinforces sola gratia. No grounds for boasting, we owe everything to God. Out of his mere good pleasure he set his love on me and I have no idea why. We must be reminded of this because reformed folk tend to not be known for their humility.

G. UE gives us encouragement that our evangelism will bear fruit (cf. Acts 18:9-10).

H. UE provides a firm foundation for the doctrines of assurance and perseverance.

If God foreordains the ends and the means there must be an unbreakable chain from regeneration to glorification. Romans 8. John 6.

I. UE invites reverent awe and worship as we acknowledge the inscrutability of God's decrees.

Romans 11:33-36.