

## **Expository Essay: Election** (NIV based)

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The doctrine of election is an interesting topic that has undoubtedly spawned numerous arguments within the church throughout the centuries. Because this doctrine is quite extensive and is part of other broader doctrines, the aspects pertaining exclusively with election as contained in the Book of Romans will be briefly explored in this paper. These aspects include God's gracious choice, God's sovereign choice, God's eternal choice, election in and through Christ, the elect church, sovereignty versus freewill, and differing views of election. Even though a universally acceptable doctrine may not be attained, there subsists value in studying the doctrine of election for the edification of the individual believer as well as for the harmony of the church at large.

### **DEFINITION OF ELECTION:**

The doctrine of election is a sub-category of the broader doctrine of predestination, which is "God's choice of individuals for eternal life or eternal death" (Erickson p.908). "Election" itself is the positive aspect of predestination, referring to either God's selection of some individuals for eternal life or to the individual who is the object of His selection (Erickson p.908; Murray p.179). [NOTE: In contrast to election is "reprobation", which is the negative aspect of predestination and describes the action of God in which He "passes over some sinners, leaving them in their sins, and at last condemning them for their sins - all according to His sovereign will" (Godfrey p.529).]

### **GRACIOUS CHOICE:**

The doctrine of election has several principles, one of which is that election is God's gracious choice or "act of undeserved favor freely shown towards members of a fallen race to which God owes nothing but wrath" (Romans 11:5; 1:18 ff.; 4:5-8; Packer p.359). Furthermore, God bestows His grace in a way that "exalts His grace by magnifying human's sinfulness" (p.359). In effect, God encapsulates sinners in their "state of disobedience and unbelief" to show their true nature before He pours out His mercy upon them (Romans 11:30-32; Packer p.359).

### **SOVEREIGN CHOICE:**

Another principle of election involves God's sovereign choice, which is prompted by "God's own good pleasure alone - not by any accomplished or foreseen works of man (Romans 9:11), nor by any human efforts to win God's favor (Romans 9:15-18; 8:7ff.)" (Packer p.360). God has the sovereign freedom and the right to discriminate between those sinners that deserve hardening (Romans 9:18; 11:7-10) and destruction (Romans 9:21ff.), and those who will be objects of His mercy and receive "the riches of His glory" (Romans 9:23; Packer p.360). Romans 9:14-21 affirms that God owes mercy to no one and that He has the right to "do as He pleases with His rebellious creatures" (Packer p.360). According to author / theologian J. I. Packer, "the wonder is not that God withholds mercy from some, but that He should be gracious to any" (p.360).

### **ETERNAL CHOICE:**

The election of God was an eternal choice, made "before the foundation of the world as an exercise of living foreknowledge" (Romans 8:29ff.) and God's current calling of the elect is the "temporal execution of an eternal purpose of love" (Romans 8:30) (Packer p.360).

#### IN AND THROUGH CHRIST:

Of primary importance to the doctrine of election is God's saving of individual sinners in and through Christ (Packer p.360). Christ, who is the foundation of election and salvation, rescues the elect from sin and guilt through the processes of calling, justification, and glorification, with the goal being that God's chosen should "become conformed to the image of His Son" and share in His glory (Romans 8:29-30,17) (Packer p.360; Klooster p.348).

#### THE CHURCH:

While the type of election discussed here is "individual, personal, specific, and particular" in nature, election has been extended by God to those of the church, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, "who have become Abraham's true seed and God's true Israel through faith in Christ (Romans 4:9-18; 9:6ff.)" (Packer p.359; Klooster pp.348-349). Whereas God's election dealt with Israel in Old Testament times, Romans chapter 9 professes that God has transferred the "covenant-privileges from the lineal seed of Abraham to a predominantly Gentile church" (Packer p.359). Moreover, Romans 11:16-24 states that the unbelieving "natural branches" or Israel were broken off from God's "olive tree" or elect community and replaced with the "wild olive branches" or believing Gentiles, being grafted in and becoming God's chosen people - the church (p.359).

#### SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS FREEWILL:

Although the doctrine of election seems to be fairly straightforward, controversy has surrounded it concerning the sovereignty of God in relation to the freewill of mankind. Dating back to early church times, disagreement has festered between church theologians, most notably Augustine versus Pelagius and Calvin versus Arminius, in regard to how much control God has in causing His elect to make "freewill decisions" to receive Jesus Christ by faith and become the elect (Augustine (A.D. 354-430), Pelagius (A.D. 354-418), John Calvin (A.D. 1509-1564), Jacobus Arminius (A.D. 1560-1609); Erickson pp.908-909).

#### AUGUSTINE / CALVIN:

The views of Augustine and Calvin are very similar and in short, they assert that election is God's absolute and unconditional choice that certain persons will certainly come to faith and salvation, and will persevere to the end (Erickson pp.916-917). A key passage is Romans 8:29a,30: "For those God foreknew he also predestined... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." This election is totally of God, being in no way dependent upon or changed by any merits or actions of those chosen (Romans 9:16; Erickson pp.916-917).

The basis for this view of election is that God is immutable, never changing His mind, and that out of His infinite mercy, God has determined from all eternity those to be the elect (Erickson p.917). Consequently, those elect humans have faith and do good as a direct result of God's irresistible grace to cause them to infallibly do and be what God has already willed (Romans 9:20-21; Erickson p.911). This concept of God sovereignly

dispensing irresistible grace to those He chooses "explains why, when the gospel is preached, some do in fact respond to it, because no sinner in and of himself has the power or capacity to believe (Romans 11:5)" (Packer p.360).

#### PELAGIUS / ARMINIUS:

This rigid concept of irresistible grace did not appeal to theologians Pelagius and (later) Arminius, who asserted that God wants all persons to be saved and therefore, He gives everyone freewill and equal ability "to believe or to meet the conditions of salvation through reason, the law of Moses, and the example of Christ" (2 Peter 3:9; Erickson pp.919,910). The elect are those who God has foreseen will accept His offer of salvation in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:1-2; Erickson p.920). So in the view of Pelagius and Arminius, God's foreknowledge and man's freewill are dominant. In contrast, Augustine's and Calvin's view places emphasis on God's predetermination and His absolute sovereignty over man's freewill. A compromising view that attempts to strike a balance between these divergent views is the doctrine of synergism, which contends that "God and man together accomplish what must be done in order for man to be saved" (Erickson p.911).

#### VALUE FOR THE BELIEVER TODAY:

Obviously, because all of these views hold credibility and Scriptural basis, it becomes extremely difficult to determine which one, if any, is correct. Whichever of these election views one may hold, there are values that can be derived from the aspects common to all of these views. First, salvation is of God - "a fruit of sovereign discriminating mercy" (Packer p.360). Thus, the believer should glory in God alone and give Him the praise that is due Him (Packer p.360). Paul himself concludes his long discussion of election with the recording of a doxology of praise in Romans 11:33-36 (Klooster p.349). Understanding the basic concepts of election should lead the believer to give "praise, reverence, and admiration to God with humility and diligence" (Klooster p.349).

Another value is that the believer can be assured of his eternal security with no fear or despondency because "nothing can affect his justified status (Romans 8:33) and nothing can cut him off from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:35-39)" (Packer p.360). But as Romans 11:19-22 indicates, this "certainty of divine vindication" should drive the believer away from "presumption or license" to sin and toward "ethical endeavor" (Murray p.180; Packer p.360).

Finally, the doctrine of election points the believer to the reality that the church is "an elect race - having the privileges of access to God" (Packer p.359). Moreover, the church has been given the responsibilities that Israel once held of faithfully guarding and proclaiming His truth (p.359). With overflowing gratitude, the believer should praise God for graciously choosing and calling into existence His body of elect - the church (p.359). The Lord says "...I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one", ...they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (Romans 9:25b-26).

#### CLOSURE:

From this study of the doctrine of election, it is clear that God has made a gracious, sovereign, and eternal choice to save in and through Christ those persons whom He elects. He has designated His elect to become His Church - the body of Christ. Even though there remains differing views and debate as to the sovereignty of God in relation to mankind's freewill, there still endures value in the doctrine of election to spur today's believer into deeper gratitude and praise of God. Until the day comes when the Lord reveals all truth completely, believers must strive to harmoniously tolerate the views of others on the doctrine of election.

---

---

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985.

Godfrey, W. R. "Predestination." *New Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988. pp.528-530.

Klooster, F. H. "Elect, Election." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984. pp.348-349.

Murray, John. "Elect, Election." *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Edited by Everett F. Harrison. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960. pp. 179-180.

Packer, J. I. "Election." *The New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by J. D. Douglas. London: Inter-varsity Fellowship, 1962. pp.357-361.

---

Copyrights:

Scriptures taken from Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®

Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2018 Mel W. Coddington, and permission is hereby granted that this document may be used, copied, and distributed non-commercially to non-profit organizations, individuals, churches, ministries, and schools worldwide, provided the copies are distributed at no charge and retain this sources documentation as supplied herein. This document is not for sale, resale, or for use as a gift or premium to be offered in connection with solicitations or contributions.

---

File name: Election-Essay.\_\_\_\_ (.htm, .rtf, .doc, .pdf)

Translation used: NIV, quoted or referred to in various places within this document

Source: www.BelieverAssist.com