

Romans

Bible Study

Election

Romans 9:11

Since there is so much bad teaching and therefore confusion about biblical election, this lesson will focus on that topic. It is one that causes great consternation mostly because it is not properly understood.

Definition

Election comes from the Greek word *eklego* (εκλεγω, Strongs 1586) and literally means to speak (*lego*) out (*ek*). A form of this word (*ekloge*, Strongs 1589) is the one most commonly used. The word simply means to choose or select. We are specifically interested in how this word is connected to a work of God. When God elects, He chooses. Who are the chosen and to what are they chosen unto? If we can answer these two questions we will understand the biblical usage of the word election.

Biblical examples of election

Israel

Israel is called a chosen nation, or God's chosen people. This is not a man-made concept but a description that was given to Israel by God (Deuteronomy 7:6—8; Psalm 33:12; Isaiah 45:4). This election of Israel was not about salvation because we know that not everyone in Israel was a believer. Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians (740 BC) and Babylonians (600 BC) because they had turned away from God. In the Tribulation to come, two-thirds of unsaved Israel will be killed leaving only those who will be saved at the end of the Tribulation when all Israel will be saved (Zechariah 13:8).

12 Disciples

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit and by the will of the Father, chose 12 Disciples to work with Him and to continue His ministry with Israel after His resurrection. There was absolutely no mistake in choosing any of them even though one had turned out to betray Him (John 6:70). Jesus, while addressing the 12 Disciples in John 13:18, says that He knows the ones He chose and He knows one of them is a devil. Again, this election was not about salvation. Judas was among the chosen Disciples but yet ended up betraying the Lord, thus demonstrating his rejection of Jesus as Messiah.

Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is an elect group made up of believers. Like Israel, everyone in this particular group has been elected. Unlike Israel, everybody in the Body of Christ is a believer. According to Romans 8:33, those in the Body of Christ are called the elect. From this verse it's impossible to see if this election is focused on our salvation. We will examine our own election in just a few moments.

Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul was chosen (elected) for a very special purpose, to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and the revelator of the Mystery. Scripture never connects election with Paul's salvation, but it does connect it with his calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Acts 22:13—14; 1 Corinthians 1:1).

Jesus Christ

Even Jesus Christ was elected (chosen) according to Isaiah 42:1. Matthew 12:18 verifies that the person spoken of in Isaiah is Jesus Christ. It is pretty obvious that He was not elected unto salvation.

Election as a special position of service

At least four out of five of the above-mentioned elections clearly have nothing to do with salvation. Israel was elect to be the nation God would work through. It's through Israel that God gave the Law and gave us Scripture. It's through Israel that God sent His Son (Romans 9:4). God never revealed Himself through Gentile nations. Israel was elect, as a nation, to be in a special position of service to God.

Peter understood Israel's special position when he called them a chosen people, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. This election wasn't about salvation, but a special position of service for them to proclaim Christ's excellencies. They were elect so they could be a light and a witness to the world (1 Peter 2:9).

The 12 Disciples were also elect for a special work of service. They were to go out and bear fruit (John 15:16). Even Judas, an unbeliever, was chosen to serve Jesus during His earthly ministry. I'm sure there were people in Israel who were saved by the message Judas preached because the message was accurate even though Judas' heart was not. This is reminiscent of preachers in Philippi who were preaching the gospel with the wrong motive, but they retained the correct message (Philippians 1:15—18).

The Apostle Paul was also elect to serve Christ. He was elect to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). Just as the 12 Disciples were elect to serve Jesus and His earthly ministry as it related to Israel, Paul was elect to serve the risen, glorified Jesus Christ and His heavenly plan for the Church, the Body of Christ.

Jesus Christ was elect to serve the Father. The Father even called Him a Servant indicating the position Jesus allowed Himself to be put under (Isaiah 42:1). Jesus Christ was given a special position of service, which He carried out perfectly and humbly (John 5:30).

Election and the Body of Christ

There are a couple of verses that seem to clearly indicate that we in the Church, the Body of Christ, are elect unto salvation. If this were the case, then it goes against how the term is applied to other people and groups. Almost all fundamental Christians would (wrongly) agree that we were elect by God before the foundation of the world and that salvation is the focus of this election (Ephesians 1:4—6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). Those who are of a Calvinistic persuasion see God choosing some to go to heaven and choosing (or not taking any action so) that all others go to hell. They would back up what they believe by saying that God is completely sovereign and He can treat the lump of clay as He wishes.

Those who follow Arminius, on the other hand, believe God looked down the corridor of time to see who would accept Christ and who would reject Him. The person whom God observed coming to Him by faith, as He looked into the future, was then elect to be saved. The Calvinists focus on God's sovereignty, while the Arminians stressed man's free will.

Most people read the verse in Ephesians 1:4 to say that He chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless (a reference to our salvation), but leave out the phrase "in Him." We were actually chosen (elect) in Him. We were not chosen to be in Him, we were chosen because we are in Him. In other words, election is a blessing that comes with our salvation and not the cause of our salvation. It also helps to see that the context of Ephesians 1 is about the blessings we have because we are in Christ. The first one mentioned is our election.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 is another verse often used to show that we are elected unto salvation. A look at the context shows that the Thessalonians were worried that they had missed the Rapture, so Paul tells them about all the things that will transpire following the Rapture. Paul then assures them that they will not go through the Tribulation because God has chosen those who are in the Body of Christ to be saved from this event. Here, being chosen for salvation means salvation from going through the Tribulation. This salvation is based on their sanctification by the Spirit and believing in the truth.

Being chosen unto salvation is not a biblical concept, although most people come to that conclusion seemingly by interpreting Scripture according to their doctrine. Election, God choosing a person or group, is always about serving Him and never should be used to show the cause of our salvation.

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