

ELECTION

Robert Stapleton

The theory of unconditional election is one that is held by numerous denominations today. Often times, and in certain "circles", one opens himself up to be criticized as being ignorant of God's Word to suggest that such a theory could not be in line with God's eternal Word. To question the scripturalness of this theory is to question the knowledge of well known and highly revered Theologians of our present day and days gone by. Many leave the impression that to question this doctrine, or for that matter any part of the overall teachings of Calvin, is to go where angels do not even dare to go. But it has long been my belief and practice that when it comes to examining such doctrines, the only thing that one has to fear is fear itself.

John Calvin, who is recognized as being the founder of the Presbyterian Church, published his Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536. It is in these "Institutes" that Calvin stated, "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which He determined what He willed to become of each. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is ordained for some, eternal damnation for others."¹ Over the centuries since Calvin first wrote the above his words have gone through numerous "revisions" or "refinements" as they were incorporated into the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter III, IV, and X², and various other creedal statements of numerous denominational groups such as the Primitive Baptists, et al. Legion is the number of books available on this subject should one desire to study it in greater detail.

In an attempt to find the much needed Biblical support for this theory numerous "scholars" believe they have found a "sugar-stick" in Romans 9:9 and following. Especially have they been pleased with what they think they have found in verses eleven thru eighteen as they twist and wrest (2 Peter 3:16) the Scriptures to force them to comply with their doctrine. Such is done to other Scriptures such as Ephesians 1:4-12 also. In order to better see what we are dealing with it is important to see that the doctrine of unconditional election is the doctrine that claims that at some point before the material creation actually began, God decreed, by His power, that certain of His creation (i.e. men and angels) would be eternally saved while others would be eternally lost. Not only is that the case, but also this election is said to be "unconditional". In other words, man cannot do anything to change this "grouping" and finds himself "altogether passive"³ in relation to the acceptance of the grace of God.

The doctrine of unconditional election finds itself connected to many other areas of the whole theory of predestination. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith lays claim to the idea that "God" works "...all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will."⁴ In the introduction to the book Predestination & Freewill, its editors claim the following, "We go to bed each night with the assurance that everything that occurs fits into his all-encompassing, preordained plan.⁵ Nothing can thwart God's plan; all that occurs is in keeping with his will."⁵ I don't know about these scholarly authors but I would find it somewhat difficult to sit down with a rape victim and say "all that occurs is in keeping with" God's "will". Or, what about the mother who has just lost a child to a sexual pervert. I wonder how much comfort she would glean from such a statement? Or, what of the young Christian wife and mother who has just lost her husband in a tragic auto accident involving a head-on collision with a drunk. Has "all" this occurred "in keeping with" God's "will"? With such a doctrine as this is it any wonder that so many are confused about God being a God of love (1 John 4:8)? But let us move on to examine the idea of unconditional election.

The word "unconditional" means "without conditions or reservations; absolute"⁶ while the word "election" means "1. a choosing or choice."⁷ Therefore, the doctrine of unconditional election advocates a choosing of man's eternal destination without any conditions or reservations. Thus, the whole point is, God has chosen certain people to salvation, and others to damnation, without there being any conditions to which they are to give in to. But is this the case? When one starts to study the Old Testament they quickly see that conditions have been placed upon man's "salvation" since the habitation of Eden. For example, Adam and Eve were given conditions relative to eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16,17). Enoch had the testimony that he pleased God in accordance to the conditions placed before him (Genesis 5:21,22; Hebrews 11:5). Noah was instructed to build an ark and enter into it or die with all the rest. Thus, his "salvation" was conditional (Genesis 6:14-22; Hebrews 11:7). Abram was told by God to get out of his country in order to be blessed (Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 11:8,9). Caleb received blessings from the Lord because he complied with the conditions set before him (Joshua 14:8,9,14; Numbers 32:11,12; Deuteronomy 1:35,36). These, and many other such examples, could be given to show from the Old Testament that man has always had conditions to which he was held accountable if he wished to please God.

When turning to the New Testament it is just as easy to see that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). If this is true, and it is, how could such be reconciled with the idea of unconditional election? To which we must respond, it cannot be! If God forces certain people to be saved, and others to be lost without their having any choice in the matter, He, therefore, is a respecter of persons. This conclusion then presents a major problem in regards to the goodness and sinlessness of God. In consideration of James 2:9, which was written by inspiration irregardless of what Calvin and Luther say, we clearly see it taught that if one has respect to persons that one commits sin. With that before us, would this not also refer to God? If not, why not? While we are on this, what of Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:17 where he stated, "who (speaking of God, RWS) without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work..." You might also note verse twenty-two while at this text, "seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth..." (emphasis mine, RWS).

In further consideration of the New Testament one must be blinded by such theories to miss the point that God has placed conditions upon salvation and the blessings associated with such. Lets consider only a small section of the New Testament Scriptures which indicate such:

1. Matthew 28:19 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing..."
2. Mark 16:16 - "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..."
3. Luke 13:3 - "I tell you Nay; but, except ye repent..."
4. John 8:24 - "...for is ye believe not that I am he..."
5. John 14:15 - "If ye love me, keep my commandments..."
6. Acts 2:38 - "...repent, and be baptized..."
7. Acts 2:40 - "...save yourselves from this untoward generation."
8. Romans 6:17 - "...ye have obeyed...that form of doctrine..."
9. 1 Corinthians 6:11 - "...but ye are washed..."
10. 2 Cor. 1:9 - "...that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God..."
11. Galatians 3:26 - "as many as have been baptized into Christ..."
12. Ephesians 6:11 - "Put on the whole armour of God,..."
13. Philippians 2:12 - "...as ye have always obeyed..."
14. Colossians 3:1 - "...seek those things which are above..."
15. 1 Thessalonians 1:6 - "And ye became followers of us...having received..."
16. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 - "And if any man obey not our word..."
17. 1 Timothy 6:17 - "Charge them that are rich...that they...trust...in God."

18. 2 Timothy 4:8 - "...there is laid up...a crown of righteousness...unto all them also that love his appearing."
19. Titus 3:8 - "...that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works..."
20. Philemon 5 - "Hearing of thy love and faith..."
21. Hebrews 5:9 - "...he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."
22. James 2:26 - "...faith without works is dead also."
23. 1 Peter 2:22 - "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth..."
24. 2 Peter 1:5 - "...add to your faith..."
25. 1 John 1:7 - "But if we walk in the light..."
26. 2 John 4 - "I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth..."
27. 2 John 4 - "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."
28. Jude 21 - "Keep yourselves in the love of God..."
29. Revelation 2:10 - "...be thou faithful unto death..."

With all of these passages before us, we wonder how one could possibly teach Calvin's doctrine of unconditional election? Each and everyone of these passages, along with numerous others just like them, clearly prove that God has made salvation conditional.

In regard to what Paul said in Romans chapter nine all that is necessary to know to understand his point is that Paul is attempting to prove God's sovereign right to "choose" the Gentiles as being His children. To prove his point Paul uses Jacob, Esau, and Pharoah as examples of his point. In looking at Jacob and Esau one is able to see that God's choice of the two was done long before either could do that which would influence his decision. Likewise, His choice of Jacob and His rejection of Esau, was not in the realm of matters pertaining to salvation in the sense that Esau was eternally lost because of what God had done. Paul's point is, God has every right under the sun to choose whomever He wishes. Be sure to pay close attention to the fact that the Gentiles, who God chose, were chosen due to their faith (Romans 9:30) and not unconditionally.

In summation then, the doctrine of unconditional election is not found in the Scriptures without the perversion of such. Those who are "elected" to salvation are those who accept the conditions offered by God. Nothing more and nothing less. When you get right down to it, it is beyond me why anyone would want to adopt this doctrine. It leaves one unable to know where he stands with God until eternity arrives. One Primitive Baptist writer, who spent page after page writing of the "ignorance" of brother J.L. Davidson who defended the truth on this matter stated the following in regards to brother Davidson and a fellow Primitive Baptist writer who had just passed away, "I feel sad for you, not Elder Fowlkes. He knew the Gospel Truth-The Doctrine of Sovereign Grace and lived accordingly. You know them but do not believe them. His soul and spirit are in heaven NOW, just as yours will be some day. I hope to be there also."⁸ Isn't that an interesting statement?

ENDNOTES

1. Cowie, Leonard W., The Reformation, The John Day Co., 1968, p. 44.
2. Leith, John H., editor, Creeds of the Churches, John Knox Press, 1982, pp. 193-206.
3. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter X, #2, The Book of Confessions, The Office of the General Assembly, 1983.
4. Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter II, #2
5. Basinger, David and Randall, editors, Predestination & Freewill, IVP, 1986, emphasis mine.

6. Webster's New World Dictionary, World Publishing Company, 1966, p. 805.
7. Webster's, op cit., p. 241.
8. Bass, Hulan F., Wind of Doctrine, J.L. Davidson, no date, p. 145.