

OUR ELECTION OF GOD

Jon Macon

In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4, the inspired Apostle Paul greeted the “church of the Thessalonians” with these words: “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; *knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*” As Paul knew the manner in which Christians have been “elected” of God, we also need to understand what the scriptures about this subject.

John Calvin’s false doctrine

There is much misunderstanding and blatant false teaching in the religious world concerning how God “elects” His children. For example, John Calvin took scriptures that speak of Christians being “elected” of God, and taught his famous false doctrines such as “unconditional election,” “limited atonement,” “irresistible grace,” and “predestination.” These doctrines say that God predestined, chose, or elected in the beginning which individuals would be saved and which would be lost. Consequently, what a person does on earth would have no bearing on his or her eternal “destiny,” because it was already decided before birth and it cannot be changed. Thus, according to Calvin, the “election” is not in any way conditional upon man’s response. Thus, Calvin taught that the atonement of Christ is “limited” to the elect and God’s grace is “irresistible” to the elect. In summary, according to Calvin’s false doctrine, in the beginning God decided on an individual level who is going to heaven and who is going to hell and there is nothing any man can do to change that. But this doctrine is terribly false.

God’s conditions for election

God does indeed refer to Christians as those He has “chosen” (Mark 13:20). But this is the same word Christ used when he “chose” the twelve apostles (Luke 6:13), and the Lord did his choosing in response to what the apostles themselves had done and what kind of people they were (including Judas). Jesus said, “*I know whom I have chosen*” (John 13:18). In the same manner, God chooses us as His children on an individual level based strictly upon whether or not we have done what He says. Unlike Calvin’s doctrine, this choosing or election *is* conditional. John 3:16, one of the best known verses in the entire Bible proclaims, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in

OUR ELECTION OF GOD

(continued)

him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Belief itself is something we must choose to have, and the Lord called faith a “work” (John 6:29). But a living faith requires works of obedience (Jas 2:14-26). That is why John 3:16 and other scriptures that teach the necessity of faith in order to obtain eternal salvation do not include the words “only” or “alone.” Thus, Jesus also said in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Baptism is one of the actions that we must take in order to obtain eternal salvation. Repentance is another (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38). Therefore, Hebrews 5:9 states that Jesus Christ “became the author of eternal salvation *unto all them that obey him.*”

Biblical predestination: *not* individuals

Finally, Christ’s atonement in *not* limited. Every single person has the opportunity to be chosen of God (John 3:16; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:1-2; Rev 3:20; 22:17). Salvation through God’s grace has appeared to all (Titus 2:11), and it *can* be resisted. Therefore, everyone has the choice to either serve God and be saved, or not serve God and be damned (Deut 30:19; Rom 1:20). God has also predestined or chosen certain things for Christians not on an individual level, but as a class. Any individual has the choice of being in this class, but everyone in the class must do certain things or fulfill certain criteria that God decided in the beginning would be characteristics of those who would be saved. For example, God chose that Christians would bear fruit (John 15:16), though He did not predestine which individuals would bear fruit. God has chosen Christians out of the world (John 15:19). God predestined before the foundation of the world that Christ would die on the cross (1 Pet 1:18-20; Rev 13:8), and that He would adopt His children in Christ (Eph 1:5). God also predestined that these Christians would be holy and blameless (Eph 1:4), and be to the praise of God’s glory (Eph 1:5,11-12; 1 Pet 2:9). The “chosen” must fulfill many other things according to God’s will (Col 3:12-15). So we see that the Bible teaches that God has predestined certain general things, but not which individuals will or will not be saved. We must choose to do what God requires for Him to choose us. And even if we obey God and are “elected” by Him, we can still become unelected by turning away from him (Heb 3:13-14). Therefore, it is our duty to “make our calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10).