

BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT MAN, SIN, AND SALVATION

Lesson 14: Election

This is the first of seventeen lessons on the biblical doctrine of salvation (soteriology, from Greek *soteria*, salvation). These are the lessons on the doctrine of salvation:

1. Election – God chose those who would receive salvation and its blessings.
2. God and the Atonement – God is just and loving; He is righteous and merciful.
3. Sacrifice – Christ died as a sacrifice to be God’s perfect substitute for elect sinners.
4. Propitiation – Christ’s sacrificial death satisfied God’s wrath against sinners.
5. Redemption – Christ’s blood was shed as a ransom payment for the sins of the elect.
6. Reconciliation – Christ’s death brings peace between God and His people.
7. Resurrection – Christ’s resurrection proves the gospel true and life-giving.
8. Gospel proclamation – God issues His gracious call of salvation to all mankind.
9. Regeneration – Regeneration is a special work of the Holy Spirit giving life to dead sinners.
10. Repentance – Sinners repent by turning to God from sin with their whole heart and life.
11. Faith – Faith is a whole-hearted commitment and trust in Christ alone for salvation.
12. Union with Christ – Those who trust in Christ have died with Him and now live in Him.
13. Justification – Those who have faith in Christ are declared to be righteous before God.
14. Adoption – Those who trust in Christ are made members of His family with countless blessings.
15. Sanctification – This is God’s ongoing process of making all Christians more and more holy.
16. Perseverance – God assures believers of glory, in hope of which they live obediently on earth.
17. Glorification – This is the transformation of the bodies and souls of believers to be like Christ.

Lesson 14 – Central Truth Q and A

Question: What does God’s choice in election mean?

Answer: God chose those who would receive salvation and its blessings.

Lesson 14 – Memory Verses

Matthew 22:14 *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

Ephesians 1:4 *even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*

Lesson 14 – Outline

Scripture teaches the doctrine of election. God chose the nation of Israel (Gen. 12:1-3) and God chose individuals for salvation in Christ (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:1-20). The doctrines of predestination and election are related, but they are not identical. Predestination refers to God’s eternal decree regarding salvation—that some people are saved and predestined to be eternally with Christ and like Christ and some people are passed over and left in their sins. Election focuses on God’s gracious choice of some sinners to receive salvation. God would remain perfectly righteous and holy if He destroyed and eternally punished all people because all have sinned and come short of His glory. But the Bible teaches that God, out of His sovereign grace alone, chose some sinners for salvation through Christ.

The doctrines of election and predestination are disliked and even rejected by some because it doesn't square with their concept of "fairness." But it is a biblical doctrine that should be understood and accepted according to what God has revealed, regardless of man's opinions.

1. The Act of Election

The Bible uses several words that mean the same thing: chosen, elect, and election. Election is God's choice of some people for salvation. Ephesians 1:3 begins with praise for God the Father who planned salvation. He gives all spiritual blessings in Christ to those whom He chose for salvation. God's motivation in the act of election and predestination (Eph. 1:4-6) was "according to the purpose of His will" and "the praise of His glorious grace." God's election of His people was based on His sovereign will. We must remember that God was under no obligation to save all sinners or any sinners. The fact that He has chosen, according to His own will, to save some sinners does not diminish His grace or tarnish His character. The salvation of some sinners is an act of sheer grace and mercy because no sinner is deserving. The Father's sovereign election was not a random choice at points scattered throughout history, but His election (choosing) took place in eternity past before creation, "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Even before God created anything, He planned and ordained to save some and He chose them and determined they would come to salvation.

2. The Objects of Election

Scripture gives no indication who the elect are except that they are the ones who repent and believe the gospel of Christ. Christ told Nicodemus that whoever believed in Him would be saved and would not be condemned (Jn. 3:16, 18). Paul wrote that those who confess Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in Him will be saved (Rom. 10:9). God the Father's election (choosing) of believers in Christ is inseparable from God the Son's substitutionary, atoning work accomplished on the cross and His victorious resurrection from the dead. Christ accomplished the necessary atonement for sinners so that God could righteously pardon them and declare them to be righteous when they exercise faith in Him. From eternity past God the Father planned the salvation of sinners, but it was worked out in time. Christ came to earth as a virgin-born baby, grew up and lived a perfectly holy life, carried out His earthly ministry, and died on the cross as the lamb of God to take away sins, then rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven where He now intercedes on behalf of His people. At God's pre-planned time, all of His chosen repent of their sins and believe in Christ for salvation. God causes that through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in conviction, regeneration, and bestowing the gifts of repentance and faith. All of salvation from eternal planning to personal application of salvation to the sinner is the gracious work of God. The church and individual Christians are responsible to share the gospel with all people, not knowing who God's elect are, but relying on God to save them when and how He pleases.

3. The Purpose of Election

God chose some sinners to be saved with a definite purpose in mind. He desires for His elect people to be "holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4). God desired a people who would be cleansed from the corruption of sin and be made righteous to know and love Him, worship and serve Him, and to be with Him for all eternity. From the moment of their conversion, God's elect people have a perfect and righteous position before Him, but they enter a process of sanctification in which they become more and more holy like Christ. They are also chosen to do God's will and good works during their Christian

life on earth (Eph. 2:10). God's elect are increasingly set apart from sin and the world and set apart for Him in this life (1 Pet. 2:9). Another part of God's purpose in election is to bless His people with adoption into His family (Eph. 1:5). Through this spiritual adoption believers become "fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17) which provides all the rights and privileges of God's dear children. Scripture teaches that through their union with Christ, the elect receive eternal life and peace with God. The primary reason for God's election is His own glorification. Paul stresses that salvation is for the praise of God's glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). God was certainly motivated by love to save His elect, but His primary motivation was to bring glory to His own name. In saving sinners and giving us all spiritual blessings in Christ, He displays His glory in us and through us.

Questions and Answers about Election

1. When were believers chosen by God?

We were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. That means it was completely of God's own choice apart from anything in us.

2 Timothy 1:9 *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

Charles Spurgeon said, "God must surely have loved me before I was born, for I am sure He wouldn't have loved me afterward." God's plan for us is eternal and not bound by time. God's plan is worked out in time, but it was set in motion before time began.

2. Why were believers chosen by God?

In everything God does He has a purpose. He chose us for two reasons: first and foremost, to bring Him praise and glory (vs. 6). God's election of sinners to salvation is bound up with other Bible truths: God's sovereignty (He is in control); God's foreknowledge (He knew us beforehand); God's foreordination (He planned salvation ahead of time); and God's grace (He could have sent all of us to hell, but He chose not to). In salvation God has revealed His amazing grace. His holiness and justice would have been satisfied if He had sent us all to hell for our sins, but His grace was magnified in salvation. The second reason we are chosen is that we might be holy and blameless (without blemish, spotless). Obviously Paul is speaking about our position and not our practice. In Christ, the unholy have been declared holy. In God's plan we are the bride of Christ and His bride will be presented in perfect holiness and purity.

Ephesians 5:27 *That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

3. How are believers chosen?

Salvation is the work of God. Some believe that God only made salvation possible through the death and resurrection of Christ, but then it is up to every man to see what he will do, either believe in Christ or reject Him. In this view, man is the ultimate decision maker, not God. In this view, there is no guarantee that anyone will believe in Christ and be saved. In this view, God waits and waits and hopes and hopes that someone will repent and believe in His Son and be saved. In this view, God has done all He can do, the rest is up to sinful man. But the Scripture presents a different picture. Salvation is the

work of God from start to finish. God begins the work of salvation in the sinner and He always completes His work.

Philippians 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

The Bible teaches that God draws sinners to Christ for salvation. The word translated “draw” is the same word used to describe fishermen drawing fish in a net or someone drawing water out of a well. Obviously, the word “draw” means more than influence. It means drawing so as to accomplish its purpose of bringing someone or something to its desired place.

John 6:37 *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

John 6:44 *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

In salvation, God chooses sinners and sets us apart by His Spirit and our belief in the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 *But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*

4. Doesn't every person have a will to choose?

Yes he does, and he must choose to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Lord tells us what we must do and He holds us responsible for doing it. We must believe (John 3:16). We must repent (Acts 2:38). Paul was reviewing his ministry at Ephesus and said:

Acts 20:20-21 ²⁰ *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house,* ²¹ *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The Bible also tells us that no one will be saved apart from God's work in their heart. An old hymn has these words: “Tis not that I did choose thee, for Lord, that could not be. This heart would still refuse thee, hadst thou not chosen me.”

Acts 16:14 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are both taught in Scripture.

John 6:37 *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

How can we reconcile God's sovereign choice (election) and our responsibility to repent and believe? We must accept both truths because the Bible teaches both. God knows how all of it fits together, and one day we will know, but for now we have to accept both. Someone asked Spurgeon how he could reconcile God's election and man's responsibility. He said, “There's no need to reconcile friends.” Here is a helpful way to think of it: If we are saved, God gets all the credit. If we are not saved, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. Nobody will ever be able to stand before God and say I wanted to be saved, but you didn't choose me.