

DESIDERATA¹
PUTTING GOD ON TRIAL
ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH
Romans 9:1-21

BIG IDEA: GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE OF SOME TO BE SAVED IS REALLY GOOD NEWS!

- The word, “election”, occurs 3 times in the NIV New Testament, and the word, “elect”, appears 11 times.
- The debate is not over whether or not God elects some people to salvation. All Bible students accept that because the Bible talks so clearly about it. So what’s the controversy about? The controversy is all about **HOW** God makes that election choice and there are two possibilities:
 1. For reasons unknown to us, God just elects some people to be saved. This is called, “Unconditional Election.” If this is what you believe, you are a Calvinist.
 2. We know the reason why God elects some people to be saved, and not others. He looks into the future and sees ahead of time which people will believe when they hear the Gospel message, and based on those future faith acts, God elects those people to be saved. This is called “Conditional Election.” If this is what you believe, you are an Arminian.
- I. CAN WE GET SAVED WITHOUT ELECTION?
 - A. Just How Spiritually Capable Are We?
 1. We need to remember that the burden on Paul’s heart in Romans 9 is to speak to a problem. The problem is that the people of Israel largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah and were under the judgmental curse of God. But, in view of all the promises God had made to the nation of Israel, how could that have happened? **Did “God’s word...fail”?** (verse 6). And, if God’s word failed for Israel, then could God’s word fail for us Gentiles, too? Is this wonderful salvation we have studied in the last 8 chapters on shaky ground? Look at all the advantages the Israelites had, *“Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.*
5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.” (9:4-5)
 2. Paul’s answer is that God **did** keep His answer to Israel. He says, you just have to pay attention to who is actually included in Israel. Appearances can be deceiving, **Verses 6-7**, *“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children.*
 - **Romans 9:13** *Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*
 - **Malachi 1:1-3** *An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. ² “I have loved you,” says the LORD. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the LORD says. **“Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.”***
 - Hated = “love less” **Cf. Luke 14:26**, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.”*
 - God has always been making choices about who inherits His promises. And He makes those choices sovereignly,
 - **verses 11-12**, *Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad--in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls--she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”*
 - **Genesis 25:23** *The LORD said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one*

¹ *Desideratum: Something considered necessary or highly desirable.*

people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

- **verses 15-16**, For he says to Moses, "I will **have mercy on whom I have mercy**, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does **not**, therefore, **depend on man's desire or effort**, but on God's mercy.

3. The big divide between Calvinistic and Arminian theology.

NOTE: 1) **Calvinism** derives from John Calvin (1509-1564) who was a Pastor and Statesman who made his mark in Geneva, Switzerland and he was one of the great voices of the Protestant Reformation.

2) **Arminianism** derives from Jacobus Aminius (1560-1609) who was a Dutch Pastor and university professor. He originally embraced Calvinism but came to believe that it made God the author of sin and made man a robot manipulated by God.

4. I can't get around it. The strong language of the Bible convinces me that there was nothing in **me** that made God elect me to be saved.

- **Augustine**: *God does not choose us because we believe, but that we may believe.*

- **Charles Spurgeon** came to the same conclusion: "When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me.... [Then] the thought struck me, **How did you come to be a Christian? I sought the Lord. But how did you come to seek the Lord? The truth flashed across my mind in a moment - I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence on my mind to make me seek Him....I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me....I desire to make this constant confession, 'I ascribe my change wholly to God.'"**

B. Just Why Does God Save Us?

1. The answer is that God saves us **just because He wants to**. **Ephesians 1:4-5**, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will--"

2. And no fair pleading "foreknowledge" because that just begs the question. "Foreknowledge" in the Bible does not mean that God just has a bigger crystal ball than anybody else. It does not just mean that God can see what is going to happen in the future. "Foreknowledge" means that God knows what is going to happen in the future because God **determines** the future.

- Foreknowledge means that God knows because He plans.
- It does not mean that He plans because He knows.

II. CAN GOD BE JUST AND PRACTICE ELECTION?

A. Is This a Legitimate Question?

1. Fortunately, somebody else asked that question and it's in **verse 19**: *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"* and the Apostle Paul has a direct answer to our question right here in **verses 20-21** *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"*

21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

2. So the answer is, **NO**, it's not a legitimate question. Since God is God, He can do whatever He wants and He doesn't even have to give us a reason. And, in this case, He doesn't give us a reason. Paul just defends God's right to choose those He wants to save and not choose others.

B. So, What's the Answer?

1. The answer is, **yes**, God can be just and practice election. The answer is in the potter analogy. A potter can make anything he wants out of any lump of clay.

- He can make a beautiful and very valuable ceramic figurine or he can make a ceramic spittoon or a basin for washing dirty clothes.
2. God is the universal potter. We are the lumps of clay and He has every just right to do with us whatever He wants.
 3. But does that mean that we are just helpless pawns? If so, how can God hold us responsible? That's the burning question in verse 19, which Paul does not answer, **Verse 19**, *One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?"*
 4. Let me answer the question, even though Paul doesn't. No, we are not helpless pawns. Just as surely as the Bible teaches that God determines the future, it also says that God is not the author of sin, in fact God doesn't even tempt anyone to sin (**James 1:13**).
 5. And, even though God is the one who elects, predestines, and calls us to Himself in salvation, the Gospel invitation reads, "*whosoever will, may come.*" Every presentation of the Gospel in the New Testament is a genuine invitation, from **John 3:16** right through to the end. When Paul was asked by the desperate Philippian jailer, "*What must I do to be saved?*" Paul didn't say, "Well, there's probably nothing you can do, unless you happen to be one of God's elect." No, this is what Paul said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved...*" (**Acts 16:30-31**) Paul actually begged people to get saved and he talked to every person he could about Jesus (**II Corinthians 5:20**, "*We implore you on Christ's behalf, Be reconciled to God.*") **II Corinthians 5:11**, "*Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.*"
 6. When it comes to evangelism, there is a sense in which we are supposed to forget everything we've ever heard about election and witness to people as if it all depended on us whether or not they get saved. **I Corinthians 9:22**, *I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*
 7. And here's a verse that will blow your mind, **II Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* If God wants everyone to come to repentance, then why doesn't He elect everybody?
 8. Does this all seem **contradictory**? It's supposed to! This subject has bent the best minds of Christendom for centuries. On the one hand God says we are morally free and morally responsible regarding our sin and our relationship with Him. All sinners are to hear the call of the Gospel and respond in faith. If they don't, God holds them seriously and forever responsible. On the other hand, we have seen that God says He chose everyone who would be saved before the world was even made. All I can say is:
 - 1) God is comfortable with it even if we're not. And it makes sense to Him.
 - 2) I guess we should expect things like this when we deal with the wonder of God.
 - We can't understand how Jesus could be fully man and fully God;
 - How God could always have been in eternity past;
 - How God can be three-in-one.
 - Hey, I don't even understand my computer!
 8. Now, if you're still having a hard time swallowing this, let's take an historical case in point: the people of Israel...

III. CAN WE EXPLAIN ISRAEL WITHOUT ELECTION?

A. How Did Israel Get Into the Picture?

1. Did God elect the people of Israel because they were spiritually responsive? Is there any indication that they had a higher "Spiritual IQ" than any other people group in the world?
 - Maybe God chose them because they came from really godly stock way back at the beginning. Nope, that's not it, **Joshua 24:2**, *Long ago your*

forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods.

- Maybe God chose to deliver the Israelites when they were Egypt because they were such an impressive nation. Nope, that's not it either, **Deuteronomy 7:7** *The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*
- **Deuteronomy 26:5** *Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.*
- **Deuteronomy 9:4-6** *After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶ Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.*

2. Then, I guess that Israel got in the picture the same way you and I did, by the wonderful and merciful choice of God.

B. Where Is Israel in Today's Picture?

1. They are on the shelf. A long time ago, Israel was largely believers, but today very few Jews in the world believe in Jesus as their Messiah and many Jews are actually atheists.
2. Nevertheless, God's up to something. The Jewish heart hasn't changed yet, except for occasional individuals who trust in Jesus, but God is up to something.
 - 1) God has preserved the racial identity of the Jews which is no less than miraculous after 1900 years of dispersion throughout the Gentile world.
 - 2) God has restored the Jews to their country. Never before in history has a people group utterly lost their land and had it restored to them as has been the case with the modern State of Israel. What happened in 1948 was tantamount to another parting of the Red Sea.
3. One more big thing is on God's calendar for Israel: **Romans 11:26** *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*
Maybe this doesn't exactly mean that **every single** Jew will be saved when Jesus comes back, but it does mean that **so many** Jews will be saved that the nation will be dominantly born again believers in Jesus.
4. How can we explain this prophesied remarkable national turn-around after several thousand years of rejecting Jesus? There is only one explanation: God has chosen that it will be so and He will make it happen. He's got a whole lot of Jews on His eternal "To Do" list and He's going to get them saved. Guaranteed. You can take it to the bank!

Timothy G. Walton
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