

Election and God's Choices

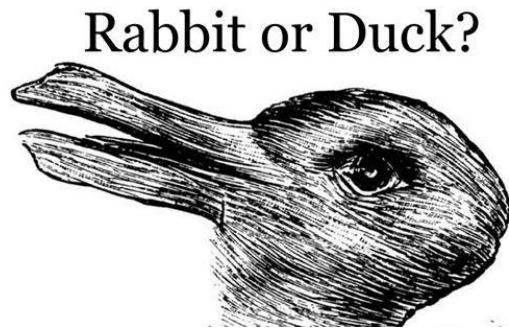
Introduction

Last time we looked at some theories of election.

- The Calvinistic View of Election
- The Arminian View of Election
- Open Theism's View of Election
- The Timeless View of Election
- The Middle Knowledge View of Election

But they are just theories. And some of these have major problems. Those theories assume that God elects individuals unto salvation from eternity past. But what if that assumption is wrong? What if election has nothing to do with God choosing who would be saved and who would be lost?

Two people can look at the same thing and come to different conclusions. For example: the rabbit-duck illusion.



Some theologians see a duck. When they look at election, they assume that God elects individuals unto salvation from eternity past.

Other theologians see a rabbit. When they look at election, they believe that it has to do with God bestowing blessings and privileges rather than deciding who will be saved and who will be eternally damned in hell.

What does the term election mean?

What is Election?

Greek Definitions:

- ἐκλογή [eklogē] Noun meaning “election; the act of picking out or choosing.”
- ἐκλεκτός [eklektos] Adjective meaning “elect, picked out or chosen.”
- ἐκλέγομαι [eklegomai] Verb meaning “to elect, pick out or choose.”

M. R. Vincent [a Presbyterian authority on Biblical languages]:

Eklogē election, and the kindred words, *to choose*, and *chosen* or *elect*, are used of God's selection of men or agencies for special missions or attainments; but neither here nor elsewhere in the New Testament is there any warrant for the revolting doctrine that God has predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life, and the rest to eternal destruction. (*Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 16; Vol. III, p. 137)

H. H. Hobbs [Baptist in *What Baptists Believe*]:

The word 'election' does not appear in the Old Testament and is found in only six verses of the New Testament. The word 'elect' appears four times in the Old Testament and sixteen times in the New Testament. The word translated 'elect' is sometimes rendered 'chosen.'... Election is not mechanical. It involves a God who is love and a man who is morally responsible. It never appears in the Bible as a violation of human will.... When reduced to its simplest elements election is twofold. First, God elected a plan of salvation which He accomplished in Christ. Man may either reject this plan or accept it.... Secondly, God elected a people to make known His elected plan of salvation.

Pastor Edward Drew:

The subject of election, as it is in the New Testament, is not what a lot of folks think it to be. Election in the New Testament is not that God formerly, in the past ages, determined to save one man and take him to Heaven, and send another man to hell. That is not in the Bible.... God has said [in effect], 'My elect are those who believe what I say.' They are the elect.... How do you get to be one of the elect? God determined, in the far ages of the past, that He would have a select people who would be made up of those who believe His Word. And whosoever will may come and believe, and be one of God's select and elect company. You can make your calling and election sure; and if you have believed God, and know you are saved, you know you are one of the elect. Beloved, that is election as you have it in the New Testament.

H. H. Hobbs:

Predestination ... simply means that God has predetermined that those who respond affirmatively to His call or election will be justified, or declared righteous, and furthermore will be glorified. All of this is 'according to His purpose.'... God's sovereign will elects those who are to be His 'royal priesthood' and 'holy nation' for the salvation of all men. The free will of man either accepts or rejects this relationship.... God has elected salvation to all who, in freedom of will, will call on Him or who will meet the conditions of the elected plan of salvation. In short, God has provided in His election all that is necessary for man's salvation.

Who/What Are Elect?

The Bible uses the term "elect/chosen" in a variety of ways.

The Temple

Deut. 12:5-6 But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes...

2 Chron. 7:12 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice.

Jerusalem

1 Kings 11:32 (but he shall have one tribe for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel).

Abraham

Neh. 9:7 You are the LORD God, Who chose Abram, And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, And gave him the name Abraham.

Moses and Aaron

Ps. 105:26 He sent Moses His servant, And Aaron whom He had chosen.

The Levitical Priests

Deut. 18:5 For the LORD your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons forever.

Israel

Is. 44:1 "Yet hear me now, O Jacob My servant, And Israel whom I have chosen.

King Saul

1 Sam. 10:24 And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen, that there is no one like him among all the people?" So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!"

King David

1 Chron. 28:4 However the LORD God of Israel chose me above all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever, for He has chosen Judah to be the ruler.

The Twelve Disciples

Jn. 6:70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

Note: The disciples were chosen (elect) for a task (ministry). They were not chosen in order to be saved. Judas was among the chosen (elect) disciples, however he was not saved. If election always relates to salvation, then that means the elect (such as Judas) can lose their salvation. But scripture clearly teaches that believers cannot lose their salvation. Therefore, the election of the disciples had nothing to do with salvation.

The Apostle Paul

Acts 22:14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you [Paul] that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.

Believing Jews at the End of the Tribulation

Mt. 24:31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Elect Angels

1 Tim. 5:21 I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.

Calvinism's Definition of the Elect

Calvinism defines the elect as that select group whom God has from eternity past appointed to salvation. All others are predestined by God to inescapable damnation.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His own glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.”

According to Calvinism, God decreed everything that would ever happen, from Adam’s fall to the final doom of billions of people.

In contrast, Scripture says:

Jn. 3:13 God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For Calvinism to be true, both “world” and “whosoever” must be changed to “elect.”

Jn. 3:13 God so loved **the world the elect** that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever the elect** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Dr. Ironside:

‘Whosoever’ means *whosoever*. Only a biased theologian with an ax to grind could ever think that it meant only the elect.

D. L. Moody:

The elect are the “whosoever wills”; the non-elect are the “whosoever won’ts.” The invitation is to all. Those who accept it are the elect.

What is the Purpose of Election?

Samuel Fisk:

The question may naturally arise, how then are predestination and election to be understood? For an answer we do not have far to go. The answer is so simple it is amazing that so many have stumbled over it. Predestination and election do not refer to certain people of the world becoming saved or lost, but they relate to those who are already children of God in respect to certain privileges or positions out ahead; they look forward to what God will work in those who have become His own.

Pastor Edward Drew:

“People have had it drilled into them that away in the past God foreordained that certain people should be lost and certain others should be saved. I would like to get that out of your minds this morning. Just let me begin by saying that that isn’t in the Bible.... God’s predestination is not salvation. God’s predestination is that those who receive the Lord shall be like the Lord Jesus. That is predestination, and nothing else is. God from the beginning, by His foreknowledge, predestinated that every believer should be made like Christ, and nothing else in the Book is predestination. That predestination is that God ordained one to be saved and another to be lost in hell eternally is not within the covers of this Book.... God has ordained from the foundation of the world that if you will trust His Son, He will make you like His Son. That is what we have here.... Those whom God predestinated to be like Christ, He called out—not before He saved them, but when He saved them, He called them out to be like Him.... It isn’t that in the past God called you and didn’t call somebody else. God’s predestination is being worked out now. In eternity past He determined that you should be like Jesus, and now that you are saved He calls

you out, that while you are here you should show forth the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Message delivered Sunday morning, March 1, 1942, on Romans 8:29-32)

F. B. Meyer:

The Hebrew nation was marvelously privileged.... But these privileges were granted, not for the nation itself, but for the blessing of mankind. This is the meaning of election. There are elect races, elect nations, elect souls, that they may be able to impart of what they have received, and communicate whatever advantages have been in-trusted.

Dr. Herbert Lockyer:

What must be borne in mind is the fact that predestination is not God’s predetermining from past ages who should and who should not be saved. Scripture does not teach this view. What it does teach is that this doctrine of predestination concerns the future of believers.

Dr. Mark G. Cambren [Baptist] He was co-founder of Florida Bible College. He has the following degrees: B.A., M.A., Th.B., Th.M., Th.D., D.D., L.L.D., Litt.D. He wrote:

Scripture teaches that God has predestinated those who have believed (and who will believe) to be conformed to the image of His Son. In other words, it is the plan of God, determined beforehand, that every believer is going to be made like unto the Lord Jesus Christ.... God has determined that those who are saved are going to be like His Son.

Dr. H. A. Ironside:

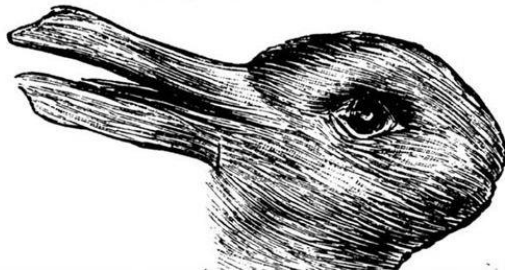
Turn to your Bible and read for yourself in the only two chapters in which this word ‘predestinate’ or ‘predestinated’ is found. The first is Romans 8. The other chapter is Ephesians 1. You will note that there is no reference in these verses to either Heaven or hell, but to Christlikeness eventually. Nowhere are we told in Scripture that God predestinated one man to be saved and another to be lost. Men are to be saved or lost eternally because of their attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ. Predestination means that someday all the redeemed shall become just like the Lord Jesus!

It is the Father who has predestinated us to the adoption of children. Nowhere in the Bible are people ever predestinated to go to hell, and nowhere are people simply predestinated to go to Heaven. Look it up and see. We are chosen in Christ to share His glory for eternity, but predestination is always to some special place of blessing. Turn to Romans 8:29. Predestinated to what? Predestinated ‘to be conformed to the image of His Son.’ You see, predestination is not God from eternity saying ‘This man goes to Heaven and this man to hell.’ No, but predestination teaches me that when I have believed in Christ, when I have trusted Him as my Saviour, I may know on the authority of God that it is settled forever that someday I am to become exactly like my Saviour.

What is Corporate Election?

Ephesians 1:3-5 describes God’s purpose in choosing believers. This passage of scripture is one of the main proof texts for the doctrine of election. As such, many of us are preconditioned to see a duck in this text of scripture. Remember the rabbit-duck illusion that we began with?

Rabbit or Duck?



Many, if not most, theologians see a duck in the picture. When they look at election, they assume that God elects individuals unto salvation from eternity past. Since that is a traditional view of election, it has a tendency to shape our understanding of Scripture. We begin to see ducks in God's Word in places where maybe we should see rabbits. So, when we read a passage of scripture like Ephesians 1, we are predisposed to make some unwarranted assumptions.

We need to set aside those assumptions and take an unbiased look at this text of scripture.

Eph. 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as **He chose us in Him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.

Note the wording. It does not say that we have been chosen "**to be**" in Him. Rather, we are chosen **in Him**. In other words, those who are in Him are chosen.

Problem #1:

Theologians who are convinced that God elects individuals unto salvation from eternity past read this verse and insert the words "to be" and assume this verse is speaking about the election of sinners to salvation. In doing so, they are adding a doctrinal bias into God's Word that which is simply not there.

How does a person get to be "in Christ?"

Option #1—The Duck View of Election:

We were placed in Christ by some secret decree which God supposedly made in eternity past. And, by the way, that secret decree cannot be found anywhere in scripture including this passage in Ephesians.

Duck theology says: "He chose us **to be** in Him."

Option #2—The Rabbit View of Election:

We were placed "in Christ" the moment we put our faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Scripture says: "He chose us in Him."

A non-biased reading of the text does not support Option #1—The Duck View of Election.

Problem #2:

Duck Theologians ignore the purpose of election as Paul explains it in this passage of scripture. They put on their theological colored glasses and read, “He chose us *to be* in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be saved from eternal damnation.” But according to the text, that is not the purpose of election. Paul wrote, “God chose us in Him that we should be holy and without blame.”

The purpose of election is not the first tense of salvation—justification. God’s purpose in election is not first and foremost that we should be saved from hell. While being saved from eternal damnation is a good thing, that is not what Paul is dealing with in this passage of scripture.

The purpose of election relates to the second tense of salvation—sanctification. God’s purpose in election is that we should be holy and without blame. There is a sense in which this is true positionally the moment we trust Christ for salvation. But God’s desire is that positional truth be lived out practically in our daily walk with Him.

1 Thes. 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

Problem #3:

The second purpose of election relates to the privilege believers have of being fellow heirs with Christ. In verse 5 Paul goes on to explain that “we have been predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.” The problem has to do with our 21st century understanding of the word “adoption.”

Today, we think of “adoption” as being legally placed into a new family.

Dictionary.com:

[Adoption is] the act or process of establishing a legal relationship between a child and a parent other than the child’s biological parent, thereby entrusting the designated adult with responsibility for raising the child.

There is a sense in which we were transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the family of God when we believed. When we think of adoption, we naturally think of being placed into God’s family when we were born-again. However, that is not what Paul was speaking about when he said that we were “predestined to adoption as sons.”

The Greek word translated adoption is υιοθεσία which means “to place as a son.” Paul used the same word in Galatians 4 which gives us a better idea of what he meant.

Galatians 4:1-7 Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

In the 1st century Roman culture, a child had the same legal status as a slave. That’s why Paul wrote, “the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave.” When a child reached a certain age, he when through a “ceremony of passage” was called

υιοθεσία “son placement.” After that the child no longer had the legal status of a slave. Rather, the child gained all the legal rights of a son who had come of age and gone through this “ceremony of passage.” At that time, he became an heir of his father.

The English language does not have a word for υιοθεσία “son placement” so translators use the word “adoption.” Unfortunately, the word “adoption” does not convey the meaning that Paul intended to communicate.

When a 1st century speaker of Greek thought of the word “υιοθεσία,” the picture of “son placement” came to his mind. He thought of the time that a child went through the “ceremony of passage” and became a legal heir of his father.

Paul used this concept of “son placement” to communicate the fact that we were made fellow heirs with Christ. He was describing a position of privilege. Unfortunately, the English word “adoption” confuses the actual meaning of what Paul was communicating.

The 21st Century understanding of “adoption”:

Having predestined us to adoption as sons [being placed into God's family] ...

The 1st Century understanding of “son placement”:

Having predestined us to υιοθεσία as sons [being placed into the position of an heir and enjoying the legal privileges of that position] ...

The purpose of election has nothing to do with being transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the family of God. The purpose of election has everything to do with becoming a fellow heir with Christ. It has everything to do with enjoying the blessings and privileges that belong to those who are in Christ. In other words, God predetermined that all who would trust in Christ for salvation would also become fellow heirs with His Son.

The Ethnos360 Position Paper on Calvinism:

According to corporate view of election, God elected a corporate body rather than individual believers. He elected a body of believers who would be saved through the “Elect One” — Jesus Christ. Therefore, all who have trusted Christ by faith are “in Christ” and they are elect in that corporate body — the Church.

Predestination does *not* refer to “God’s predetermining from past ages who should and who should not be saved. The doctrine of predestination concerns the future of believers.” God has predestinated [or pre-appointed] any and all who would believe to all the glorious blessings associated with their eternal salvation. God has “predestinated us [*the church*] unto the adoption of sons...” (Eph. 1:5). His purpose for the predestination of all *believers* is our total conformity “to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29).

In relation to eternal salvation, *election* has application only to believers, that is, those “in Christ.” God has “chosen [or elected] us [*the church*] in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him” (Eph. 1:4). We believers were not elected to be put into Christ. We were “elected in Christ.” “It is not that individuals are in the church because they are elect, it is rather that they are elect because they are in the church....”

Oliver B. Greene:

If God has everything cut and dried—elected and chosen—predestinated and fixed—why on this earth did Jesus request the disciples to pray that more laborers would be sent into the fields white unto harvest? ... The Church as a body was chosen in the beginning by Almighty God. The Church as a body was chosen to be the Bride of Christ. As a body it was chosen, elected, and predestinated to be a holy Church without spot or wrinkle. Paul is not suggesting that some are chosen to be saved and others are elected to go to hell.

Conclusion

Samuel Fisk:

Election largely involves: (a) the community or body as a whole (individuals as comprising the body); (b) it has to do with service or witness to the world as part of the plan of God; and (c) it looks less back than forward to what lies out ahead for those called of God. In addition, the word *elect* is taken by some to be more of a title and it may refer to individuals as related to position, privileges, or office.

There may be other theories on election and predestination that do not quite fit into these basic views. Some theologians may have a hybrid view of election which contain elements from several views. For instance, C. Gordon Olson wrote, “In a real sense election is both corporate and individual.”

While none of these views answers all the questions concerning God’s sovereignty and man’s free will, the Calvinistic teaching of Unconditional Election is by far the most problematic with many aspects being contrary to the actual teaching of Scripture.

The sovereignty of God and the free will of man in relation to salvation has often been the subject of debate by sincere students of God’s Word. Many have attempted to explain the complex elements of election and have come to a wide range of conclusions.

Dr. John Walvoord gave some sound advice:

“While there are serious problems in human comprehension of this doctrine [election], one should submit to divine revelation even if he cannot completely understand it.”

Old Adage:

God said it. I believe it. That settles it.

Larry Johnson:

God said it. That settles it, whether or not I believe it.

Election is scriptural.

1 Pet. 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...

It might not totally make sense until we get to the other side. In the meantime, I don’t plan on losing a whole lot of sleep worrying about how God works out all the intricacies of His plan of election.