

Election

(A) What about whosoever will?

The Doctrine of Election

These notes are my comments on some of the legitimate questions about the doctrine of Divine Sovereign Election. This doctrine has been one of the more divisive issues in the New Testament Church. While I believe that Election is clearly and repeatedly taught in both the Old and New Testaments, this doctrine does provoke very significant emotion. It seems to me that there really are only two fundamental possibilities in this issue. The first view is that everyone who is, or will be saved, has been chosen or Elected by God before the foundation of the world, apart from any merit in/by those saved. The second view is that God has provided the way to salvation to everyone and whosoever, of their own independent will, chooses to believe in Christ, is saved. There is actually a third view which is a hybrid of the first two. This position would hold that BOTH views are true. That is, Election and Free Will are both simultaneously true. It is my understanding however that this position will be automatically addressed if we can resolve the first two. At any rate, the debate revolves around multiple *whosoever will* passages. We'll consider John 3:16 as an example of these.

John 3:16-18, NASU

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

This very familiar and loved text, especially John 3:16, is sometimes quoted as the very Gospel itself. It is a powerful declaration of the plan and will of the Father and the Son. For those who believe in both Election and Free Will, passages like John 3:16 that talk of "whosoever will" have come to be considered like a plan B. That is, we believe in Election, God's Sovereign choice in salvation, but we also believe that "whosoever will" is another path to salvation. This concept has been described as two parallel train tracks, each leading to the same salvation. They appear to be contradictory (not touching) and thus like parallel lines only meet in eternity. But is that really what Jesus is teaching here?

First we need to state the obvious, that **John 3:17 is NOT teaching that the whole world is, or will be, saved through Christ.** Such universal salvation is refuted throughout the Scriptures. In fact, the very next verse (3:18) makes it plain that not everyone in the world is going to be saved. Rather, out of the *whole world* it is only those who *believe in Him*. **So eternal life (salvation) is specifically limited to the "whosoever's" that believe in Him.** The real question is, who are

these people? Does this passage describe salvation by Election or by the free will of those who believe? The answer to this question IS the debate. Does John 3:16 (and other passages as well) teach that a person, of their own free will, will choose to believe in Christ? Or does it describe every believer as chosen of God, Elect? Let's look at some more Scripture. We'll start with the same author, John, just a few verses prior to 3:16.

John 1:11-13 NASU

11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Note in this passage that there is an almost textbook definition of those who 'receive Him', the 'children of God', those who 'believe in His name'. These terms are often used to identify a true believer, and are **exactly identical with the 'whoever believes in Him' of John 3:16**. That is, the *whoever believes in Him* of John 3:16 is identical to *those who believe in His name* of John 1:1. To assume he is describing two different groups of people is absurd. But what's of special interest in John 1:11-13 is the additional description of these believers. There are (4) specific descriptors given in 1:13, (3) are what/who they ARE NOT, and (1) is what they ARE.

First they are NOT born of *blood* or natural descent. This fundamentally says that the *children of God* are not born of the flesh, of human process. This is a *spiritual* birth. Jesus taught this in John 3:6.

John 3:4-6 NASU

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

So the fundamental here is that those who believe in Him, the children of God, are not born of the flesh. Period. The children of God, those who believe in Him, are born of the Spirit.

Second, back to 1:13, the extremely important truth is that the true believer is NOT born by the will of the flesh. The NIV translates this as *nor of human decision*. This clearly rules out any self-initiated action (*will of the flesh*) by the believer. He does not choose by himself, to believe in Christ. This puts real clarification on the *whoever believes in Him* of John 3:16. This *whoever believes in Him* does NOT do so by his own self-will. This is taught consistently in Scripture. Consider;

Rom 9:15-16 NASU

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 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

The importance of these passages in resolving the question of Free Will cannot be overstated. After all, the base question is whether the *whoever will's* of John 3:16 believe in Christ of their own choice, of their unaided free will. And what these (and many other passages) teach, absolutely ending the debate, is that they are not saved of their own free will! Of our own free will we all would only choose to reject Him. That's why salvation is such Amazing Grace!

What John has taught so far is that whatever these *children of God* are, it's not physical and it's not of their self will. And third, the one who truly believes is NOT the result of the *will of man*. The NIV and NET render this as *a husband's will or decision*. This is absolutely ruling out any sort of physical inheritance. This is probably aimed at those, like the Jews, who thought that solely because they were Jews, they were automatically saved.

So from John 1:11-13 we find that those who *believe in His name* are NOT children of God by human process, they are NOT children of God by their own choice, and they are NOT the children of God by any inherited position. But they ARE children of God *by God*. That is Election. Now consider,

Rom 3:9-19 NAS

*9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;
10 as it is written,
"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."
13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"
"THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";
14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";
15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,*

17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."
18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

In this climatic passage (see Romans 1 and 2) Paul vividly describes the spiritual state of **everyone** outside of Christ. The passage is sobering and makes us uncomfortable. We read the description of ourselves and squirm. We try to convince ourselves that this must be talking about someone else! But the passage is unyielding. No escape. Every mouth is closed and all the world is guilty before a Holy God. Note that there is no one who seeks after God, or does good. There is absolutely no way that from this pit of death there would rise a *self initiated whosoever* that would believe in Christ. These passages will simply not support any such view. So where does all of this leave us in considering John 3:16?

The offer of salvation goes out to the whole world. This is sometime referred to as the **General Call** to salvation. It's not limited to Jews, any race or creed or denomination, or lineage. And while the offer goes to the whole world, as difficult as it is to accept, **left alone no one would believe!** We would all hear the Gospel and of our own choice, our own free will, would reject! *There is none who seeks for God. There is none who does good, there is not even one. BUT...*

God made a way for His chosen ones. The *whosoever* of the Scriptures that do *believe in Him* **are** the ones whom God has chosen. That's the clear teaching of Jesus in John 6.

John 6:37-39 NASU

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

John 6:44-45

44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. 45 "It is written in the prophets, 'AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.

John 6:65

65 And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

John 6:37 is often referred to as the **Effectual Call** to salvation. **This call from the Father is 100% successful.** It may or may not be coincident with the General Call. That's why when the Word is preached and a call to receive Christ is given, some may truly believe while others hear the same message and don't believe. So there is no contradiction between the passages in John 6 (and scores of others) teaching God's Sovereign election and John 3:16 (and scores of others) teaching whosoever will. They are both saying the same thing. ***God's children, the Elect, are the (only) whosoever's that believe in Christ.***

Practical application of Election:

There are so many other passages that have been argued as refuting sovereign Election but I believe they all actually reinforce the conclusions above. As uncomfortable as it may be, free will is not the path to salvation. Free will is always the path to destruction. If it were not for God's incredible grace and mercy there would be no one who would be saved. So in the final analysis;

Eph 2:8-10 NASU

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Many have argued that this is somehow not fair, that God is unjust. Paul answers this objection head on in Romans chapter 9.

Rom 9:14-20 NASU

14 What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 15 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 So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?

Romans 9:20 is his summary conclusion. You and I would do well to not put God on trial! His ways are absolutely right and just.

The Scripture teaches that absolutely everyone is guilty and accountable with no defensive argument (Rom.3). God does not have to be gracious to anyone, but He is! And for all eternity His children who believe in Him will bring glory to the God of our salvation.

Some have argued that this doctrine should not be taught or emphasized because it undermines all missionary work and/or evangelism. The argument is something like, "Why should I bother. If God has chosen them, they'll get saved. If not, I'm just wasting my time"! Such thoughts are absolutely foreign to the Word of God.

Note first that evangelism is not optional for believers. It's a command.

Matt 28:18-20 NASU

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Second, note that even those who are chosen of God may not believe in Him the first time they hear the Gospel. And maybe not the 10th time! But God is patient and longsuffering (II Pet.3:9). Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart. We should never give up praying for the lost. We should work as hard as we can to see people come to Christ. But we should never forget that the work of salvation is His work! And what a privilege it is to be there, to be used of the Lord, to present the saving Gospel! We don't know who will believe nor when they will believe. But we can rest in Him that the chosen will believe! He will lose none of them! (Jn.6:39).

Instead of being "unfair", we see this deep truth as our hope and our rejoicing. It brings glory and praise to God alone. If you know Christ as your Lord and Savior you are indeed most blessed! Thank Him for His gift to you and pray that He would use you to point others to believe in Him.

Thankfully, in Him,

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