

ISSUES IN ELECTION

A Sketch

Introduction

Some of the issues involved in the biblical doctrine of election have come up before me recently to challenge and invite my understanding of this important aspect of the relationship between God and man. The paper in progress is an attempt to work through some of these issues. I may not have answers to all the questions when this is over, seminary does not lend itself to resolving issues because of the lack of time for independent reflection and research, but I hope to have a better understanding of some of the elements involved in the important issues for continuing work and reflection in the future. It has been my practice over the years to take time to work through problems that have presented themselves until comfortable with a position that can be adhered to. With God's help that will be the approach and result with the issue of God's choice of those who are His.

The method I've adopted consists in identifying an issue, then seeking a biblical perspective by the Spirit, then going to secondary sources for feedback and refinement, then back to the Scripture for "final" reworking of the previous thinking.

One of the major concerns about working with this doctrine is the challenge of approaching it in a balanced way, without being effected by preconceived notions, or rather, leaving them in God's hand, as much as possible, to move me toward the truth and to protect me from error. There is also the pressure of fearing other people's opinions.

Challenges for thought include the basis for election or choice, the effect on personal growth and sanctification and the nature and source of faith.

The real issue is not the fact of but the basis of God's choice. "You are a chosen race" (1 Pet 2:9 NASB). That we are "those who have been chosen of God" (Col 3:12 NASB) is certainly not the issue, it is a fact. The issue that has divided our Christian family on this is the basis or the why of God's choice. Is it unknown and hidden in the mind of God, as the Reformed position holds, or is it based on faith, as the Arminian position holds? Are there holes in the thinking of either or, more probably, both sides, with the truth lying somewhere else? If "we have the mind of Christ" and "to us God revealed them through the Spirit," then is a logical impasse a valid stand, if God's Spirit is with us, "that we might know the things freely given to us by God" (1 Cor 2:16, 10 and 12, respectively NASB)? Both sides in this fight resolve their stand in such a way that God seems fair and just in the end so the question is the soundness of arriving at that end. Is there a better approach to solving theological problems than has been employed in the past?

Personal Growth

The church is going to be forced to be better at growing people in the future. The reformation focused mainly on the issue of salvation and we seem to not have gone very far since. Our views on salvation must be examined in the light of daily life to see if they are such that we can live by them and be changed by them. There must be a consistency between the way God works to save and the way God works to continue to save. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col 2:6 NASB). If we view God improperly we will become a tarnished reflection of Him to others and will suffer the diminished fruits in our own lives. Neither a cold, arbitrary God or One Who is limited and controlled by man will be the view that carries us to our great potential in Christ and so reflects His marvelous glory and

nature. “Beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord (we) are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18 NASB). A proper view of God will determine the future of the church.

Faith

One’s view of faith is the central issue that lies at the core of the theological matrix of the doctrine of election. R. C. Sproul, “the classic issue . . . focuses on one aspect of the order of salvation: What is the relationship between regeneration and faith?”¹ Packer and Johnston call it the “crucial issue,”² this matter of faith. Again, at stake here is the effectiveness of our daily Christian walk for “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7 NASB). Many verses speak to the issue of faith for our realistic daily life of fellowship and dependence on God. This issue was examined in an earlier position paper this semester and must be a major part of the broader consideration of election and its theological underpinnings. At issue are two things, a realistic and workable understanding and definition of faith, one that can deal with the real world, and the pursuit of consistency when talking about faith in different contexts. Inconsistency has been noted in the Reform view depending on whether the context is election or justification. This will be examined to see if it is widespread and how it is reconciled. An understanding of faith is important, in itself, for a more stable relationship with Jesus Christ as a day to day reality.

¹ R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 23.

² J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, “Historical and Theological Introduction,” in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957), 58.

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