

Foreknowledge and Election

From the beginning of the plan of salvation, when it was laid in heaven, God foreknew that those who had the right kind of faith (the kind that brings pure-hearted obedience to His law), would enter into eternal life.

Every line in the Sermon on the Mount speaks of this foreknowledge:

Matthew 5

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

There you have described the people whom God elects for His kingdom. He foreknew that such would be the ones who would be elected. Whom did God foreknow? The “poor in spirit.” And what are they elected to? “The kingdom of heaven.” Whom did God foreknow? “The meek.” And what are they elected to? To “inherit the earth.” And so on. Here it is again:

Revelation 21

⁷ He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Whom did God foreknow? “He that overcomes.” What is he elected to become? “He shall be my son.”

Here it is again:

Revelation 22

¹⁴ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Whom did God foreknow? “They that do his commandments.” What are such elected to? “They have right to the tree of life and enter in through the gates into the city.” This shows that Jesus was not speaking an impossibility when He said:

Matthew 19

¹⁷ ...If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.

Election based on Faith and Obedience

This is not the standard interpretation of “election”, but it is Biblical and reasonable. It shows that the election of God is based on character. This character is started by faith, because only God can put good in the place of evil in our hearts. It is then perfected by works:

James 2

²² See how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

The good that God plants in the heart is to work itself out into the human character, and thus make a man “conformed to the image of of His Son” (*Romans 8:29*).

But man wants to find another way to heaven, other than faith and obedience. And so if God elects me, not because of my faith or obedience, but because of some mysterious, arbitrary, non-understandable choice of His mind, then I may have a chance for heaven, even though my sin is not slain. This is the real root of the dispute over “election.”

But framing a doctrine of election which circumvents the law of God is not wise. Those who teach against the commandments will be called least in the kingdom of heaven (*Matthew 5:19*).

The Righteousness of Faith

The whole of *Romans* 9 discusses election. There are specific qualifications for being the “elect.” These qualifications are summed up in the expression “the righteousness of faith.” The argument is summed up in the last verses of the chapter:

Romans 9

³⁰ What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

³¹ But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, have not attained to the law of righteousness.

³² Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

³³ As it is written, “Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offense: and whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed.”

God wants people who keep the “law of righteousness.” Israel knew that, and so they tried to keep that law, according to their own strength and understanding. But it was not possible for their corrupt hearts to produce real righteousness. Jesus was a stumblingstone to them because He offered them the change of heart that they needed to really fulfill the law. Most of them refused this, because of pride. But a few accepted the invitation, believed that Jesus could make them holy, and thus “attained to righteousness.” Through faith, the law was fulfilled in them (*Romans* 8:4). These were then sent to the Gentiles to invite them into the kingdom of God also.

God’s Foreknowledge Considered

We have seen that God has decreed a certain reward for a certain type of character. “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” This foreknowledge is simply based on the principles of His law. An Old Testament example of this are the “blessings and curses” spoken in *Deuteronomy* 28.

But God also foreknows what people will do in their lives. He named Cyrus before he was born, and he saw that Jacob would respond to His gospel, whereas Esau would not. Therefore He said, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” But what did God love about Jacob?

Psalm 11

7 The righteous Lord loves righteousness.

It was God’s foreknowledge that Jacob would have the “righteousness of faith” and therefore live a righteous life, that inspired God to mark him out as a man “loved of God.” It was for the same reason that Daniel was “greatly beloved” (*Daniel* 9:23, 10:11, 10:19) and John was the apostle that “Jesus loved” (*John* 13:23).

Jesus is the Elect

Jesus is particularly called the “elect of God”:

Isaiah 42

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

All who accept Him as their new spiritual father are elected in Him:

Ephesians 1

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

⁴ According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved.

⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Election Offered to All

This election is offered to all people:

Romans 11

³² For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

If God elected people by some mysterious arbitrary choice, then there is no reason why Israel after the flesh should not have been all elected for heaven, for they were especially His “chosen people”, the “apple of His eye.”

But if the election is based on spiritual qualifications, then it is easy to understand why the whole nation were not accepted. The election is based on having the “righteousness which is of faith” (*Romans* 9:30), which they refused. This election is therefore open to every man, be he a Jew after the flesh, or a Gentile. It is not dependent on flesh, but on spirit.

Will you look to God in faith, believing that His Son can take away your sinful life and replace it with His sinless life? Then ask, and you will receive.

Revelation 22

¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Qualifications for Election

Consider the term election. In an earthly nation, those who do the electing have the power of choosing who they want. They choose the one whom they think is best qualified for the job.

So it is with God. He knows what positions He has open in heaven, and what kind of people are required to fill those positions. He elects those who have the qualifications. The qualifications are spelled out in the Bible, and illustrated in the life of Jesus and the holy men and women portrayed there.

Now how do we get those qualifications? Do we get them by some arbitrary choice on God's part? That's what the Jews thought. They thought that their fleshly heritage made them special to God. They thought He chose them and loved them above all other nations, because...well, just because! But they were wrong. Paul spells out in *Romans* 9 that it is the "righteousness of faith" that qualifies people for election. This is not arbitrary, nor mysterious.

There are works that go along with the "righteousness which is of faith." Sometimes the Bible terms these "God's works," other times it refers to them as "our works." But in all cases, they are in opposition to the "works of the flesh," or the "righteousness which is of the law" which Paul refers to a few times.

One type of works proceeds from the Spirit and the new man, the other proceeds from the flesh and carnal mind. Both attempt to please God. Only one of them is genuine. And only one of them does God accept.

The sacrifice of Abel was accepted because Abel had faith in the Redeemer whom the sacrifice pointed to. He felt his need of such a Redeemer, and was grateful that God had made provision to restore the human family. Abel's sacrifice showed his obedience because he followed out the precise details required by God in giving the sacrifice.

Cain's sacrifice was not accepted because it only celebrated the works of Cain's hands. It did not show faith in a Redeemer, nor was it following out the precise details God had given. The lesson in the sacrifice was marred by the way Cain performed it. And he performed it that way because his heart was not submissive to God's instructions.

In the messages to the churches of Revelation, the word "faith" is mentioned twice, whereas "works" are mentioned 11 times, "I know thy works," "I have not found thy works perfect," "do the first works," "keep my works unto the end," etc.

Therefore, works have a part in election, but not the “works of the flesh.”

God wants pure-hearted works, works that allow the love of the Father to flow to the world, through His Son Jesus Christ. These works will proceed when we have the right kind of faith. Hence the analysis in Revelation of the works of the churches. If the works are not right, then the faith isn't either!

The apostle Peter drew a clear connection between good works and election:

2 Peter 1

⁵ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

⁸ For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

¹⁰ Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, you shall never fall.

The election starts with saving faith. It is made perfect through works:

James 2

²² See how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Because election is based on character, it is conditional. Those who have the character will be given the responsibility.

Revelation 22

¹⁴ Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

If a man loses the righteousness of God, then he loses his election. Some will have their names “blotted out of the book of life” (*Revelation* 3:5).

We are instructed to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (*2 Peter* 1:10). By the same reasoning then, if you don’t “do these things” then your election will fail. What are “these things?” Let’s read them again:

2 Peter 1

⁵ And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

⁶ And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

⁷ And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

“If you do these things you will never fall.” This is the election of God, and His assurance to us.