

Unconditional Election?

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion,, Book III, chapters 21, section 5 (1559 edition).

No one who wishes to be thought religious dares simply deny predestination, by which God adopts some to hope of life, and sentences others to eternal death. But our opponents, especially those who make foreknowledge its cause, envelop it in numerous petty objections. We, indeed, place both doctrines in God, but we say that subjecting one to the other is absurd . . . We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, chapters 21, section 7 (1559 edition).

The election of individuals as actual election

Although it is now sufficiently clear that God by his secret plan freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others, still his free election has been only half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt. These are reckoned among the unique offspring mentioned by Paul [cf. Rom. 9:7–8; Gal. 3:16 ff.].

Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, chapters 24, section 3 (1559 edition).

3. Faith is the work of election, but election does not depend upon faith

But here we must beware of two errors: for some make man God's co-worker, to ratify election by his consent. Thus, according to them, man's will is superior to God's plan. As if Scripture taught that we are merely given the ability to believe, and not, rather, faith itself! Others, although they do not so weaken the grace of the Holy Spirit yet led by some reason or other, make election depend upon faith, as if it were doubtful and also ineffectual until confirmed by faith. Indeed, that it is confirmed, with respect to us, is utterly plain; we have also already seen that the secret plan of God, which lay hidden, is brought to light, provided you understand by this language merely that what was unknown is now verified—sealed, as it were, with a seal. But it is false to say that election takes effect only after we have embraced the gospel, and takes its validity from this. We should indeed seek assurance of it from this; for if we try to penetrate to God's eternal ordination, that deep abyss will swallow us up. But when God has made plain his ordination to us, we must climb higher, lest the effect overwhelm the cause. For when Scripture teaches that we are illumined according as God has chosen us, what is more absurd and unworthy than for our eyes to be so dazzled by the brilliance of this light as to refuse to be mindful of election? In the meantime, I do not deny that to be assured of our salvation we must begin with the Word, and that our confidence ought to be so intent as to call upon God as our Father. For some men, to make sure about God's plan, which is near us, in our mouth and heart [Deut. 30:14], perversely yearn to flit about above the clouds. This rashness, therefore, must be restrained by the soberness of faith that in his outward Word, God may sufficiently witness his secret grace to us, provided only the pipe, from which water abundantly flows out for us to drink, does not hinder us from according its due honor to the fountain.

Acts 13:48

- Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
- We're told this serves as an example of those who were chosen before the world was created to be saved.
- **Rebuttal:**
 - If we isolate this passage, that interpretation would not seem silly.
 - My question: Does this emphasize individuals chosen to be saved, or does it show that God's redemptive plan was always meant to extend to the Gentiles?
 - I wouldn't create a doctrine based on this passage alone. Let's continue our search.

Ephesians 1:4-5

- Ephesians 1:4-5 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will,
- *Institutes, 3.22.3 "Paul seems afterward further to confirm what he had said when he states: "According to the purpose of his will" [Eph. 1:5, Vg.], "which he had purposed in himself" [Eph. 1:9]. For to say that "God purposed in himself" means the same thing as to say that he considered nothing outside himself with which to be concerned in making his decree. Therefore he adds at once that the whole intent of our election is that we should be to the praise of divine grace [cf. Eph. 1:6]."*
- We're told God chose some to be saved before the foundation of the world.
- **Rebuttal:**
 - I believe Paul is speaking about the Jewish nation ("us" vs. "you" [Gentiles] in 2:11). This concerns the Hebrew nation, chosen by God before creation to be holy and blameless, adopted by God, and brought to fruition through Jesus according to God's will. Simply put, this is about God's plan, not the man. God first offered redemption and forgiveness to the Jewish nation, then to the Gentiles. Objectively, this passage doesn't prove either position.

Romans 9:10-13

- Romans 9:11-12: Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, God's purpose of election continued, not because of works but because of him who calls; she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."
- *(Institutes, 3.21.7) "Therefore Paul skillfully argues from the passage of Malachi that I have just cited that where God has made a covenant of eternal life and calls any people to himself, a special mode of election is employed for a part of them, so that he does not with indiscriminate grace effectually elect all [Rom. 9:13]. The statement "I have loved Jacob" [Mal. 1:2] applies to the whole offspring of the patriarch, whom the prophet there contrasts to the posterity of Esau. Still this does not gainsay the fact that there was set before us in the person of one man an example of election that cannot fail to accomplish its purpose. Paul with good reason notes that they are called the "remnant" [Rom. 9:27; 11:5; cf. Isa. 10:22-23]."*
- Calvin believed vs. 13 refers to the nations of Jacob and Esau; nonetheless, he also held that it serves as an example of unconditional election, i.e., individual salvation. One was chosen before birth; the other was not.
- **Rebuttal:**

- He seems to misunderstand the thought process because of his position. Physical descendants of Israel are not promised eternal life because of their lineage. Their lineage does not matter for salvation. God chose that family based on a promise. He made promises to individuals unrelated to their morality; it was about bringing about Christ. So God was not unfaithful to His promise. The problem was they were not true Israelites who should have faith. Read the end of chapter 9 for your answer. They were lost not because God was unfaithful, but because they did not put faith in Jesus.

God's Character

- I will keep returning to God's character. Many of Calvin's conclusions are unsupported assumptions. They create a confusing, unstable, and biased God without explanation, one who seems to offer disingenuous gifts.
- Consider:
 - Gen. 4 (Cain); Gen. 15:6 with Rom. 4 (Abraham); Josh. 24 (Choose this day); Matt. 13 (Parable of the Sower); Matt. 22 (Many called, few chosen); Acts 2 (Pentecost); Heb. 11:6 (Without faith); 1 Tim. 2:3-6 (desires all people to be saved) ; 2 Pt. 3:9 (not wishing that any should perish); Matt. 23:37 (how I would have, but you were unwilling).
 - Calvin did not believe God responded to your faith. He believed God chose and regenerated you before you chose to follow God. Question: Is your faith genuine? What does that say about God's nature? What does that say about our relationship? What is the point of spreading the gospel, warning others, and all the warnings and "IF" statements in the New Testament? What is the point?
 - (Institutes, Book 3, Chapter 24, Section 4) *"Rare indeed is the mind that is not repeatedly struck with this thought: whence comes your salvation but from God's election? Now, what revelation do you have of your election? This thought, if it has impressed itself upon him, either continually strikes him in his misery with harsh torments or utterly overwhelms him. Truly, I should desire no surer argument to confirm how basely persons of this sort imagine predestination than that very experience, because the mind could not be infected with a more pestilential error than that which overwhelms and unsettles the conscience from its peace and tranquillity toward God."* Yet, Paul was confident of his justification. Are you?