

COMMON QUESTION NO. 4

DOES GOD CHOOSE PEOPLE TO BE SAVED?

This is a question that can cause emotions to run high. Perhaps you think the very question is objectionable, the very thought that it is *God* who chooses being offensive. Before you stop reading consider the following two questions. Are you able to save yourself from your sins? Are you sure you know what the Bible says about this subject? In the paragraphs that follow we shall seek to answer these questions, and others.

1. **The Bible uses the language of God choosing** (see the word 'chosen' or 'elect'). So we cannot simply dismiss it, but must seek to understand what God is saying.

- All Christians were chosen by God - Matthew 24:22,24,31, Luke 18:7, Romans 8:33, 2 Timothy 2:10, Titus 1:1, Revelation 17:14.
- Believing Jews, as opposed to Israel in general, were chosen by God – Romans 11:5,7.
- Christians that make up local churches were chosen by God – in Ephesus (Ephesians 1:4), Colossae (Colossians 3:12); Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13), 'Babylon' (1 Peter 5:13), and the dispersion (1 Peter 1:1, 2:9, 2 Peter 1:10).
- The 11 Apostles were chosen by God (John 13:18).
- Individuals were chosen by God – Rufus (Romans 16:13), the lady and her sister (2 John 1,13).
- Even certain angels were chosen by God – 1 Timothy 5:21.

So the teaching that God has chosen people to be Christians is frequent language in the Bible. Why do we not refer to each other, or Christians in general, as chosen or elect? We ought to, because the Bible does. It is far more common to hear that the sinner should choose God (or Christ), yet this is not the typical way the Bible speaks.

2. **When does God choose people to be saved?** Not in their life time after they have done certain things! In the case of Jacob and Esau, God said that the elder would serve the younger even before they were born, "in order that God's purpose of election might continue" (Romans 9:11). God has an eternal purpose of which the choosing of people to be saved is a central part. Of the Christians in Ephesus it is written that God chose them "before the foundation of the world" (1:4), and not just before they were born. God made His choices even before He created the world. Another word is *predestination*, God choosing the destiny beforehand, in this case eternal glory (Romans 8:29-30). God predestined before He justified, as part of His purpose from eternity to eternity (see Ephesians 1:5,11). God is not like men who make plans as they go along, having to change because of lack of knowledge or change of circumstances.

3. **On what basis does God choose?** Does God choose because of some good thing he sees in a person? This cannot be as the Bible is so clear that salvation is not because of anything we do; it is not by works (so Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:9). While agreeing with this there are those who say that God chooses because He foresees a person will believe; so, it is said, that God chooses those who believe. But this is not the Biblical teaching, for the following reasons:

- ✳ "Foreknowledge" is of persons, not of faith (Romans 8:29). So often 'to know a person' is not to know something about them but to have a personal relationship with them. When God foreknew those He predestined, it means He knew them beforehand in love and so planned a glorious destiny for them.
- ✳ Faith itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). In Antioch it is "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). They were not appointed to eternal life because they believed, but the other way round. So faith is the consequence of God's saving action.

✳ God chooses on the basis of His sovereign mercy (Romans 9:15-16). Paul is answering the objection that when in election God chooses Jacob and not Esau then He is acting in injustice (v. 14). His answer is that Jacob was not chosen because of anything in him, but only because God is merciful. And who dares question God when He shows mercy to whom He will, none deserving any of His blessings because of their sin? (see v. 20)

God is sovereign in showing mercy. This is the only reason why Israel became His people (read Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Why Jacob and not Esau? Why only one thief on the cross? Why Saul of Tarsus and not other Pharisees? Why you and not some others in your family? It is only because God chose to have mercy on you.

4. What can we say about those God has not chosen? God deals with them on the basis of their sins, rendering to them the judgment they deserve. If you ask, 'Why did God not choose them to be saved?' there is only one answer, "such was your gracious will" (Matthew 11:26). This is in response to God graciously revealing the truth to "little children" but not to the cities of Galilee that would face more severe judgment than even Sodom. Jesus emphasized that the Father can be known only by one "to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v. 27). It seems that the fact God judges "the vessels of wrath" only serves to highlight the wonder of His salvation of "the vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:22-23).

5. Is this teaching important and practical? The Bible is not just a book of teaching for the sake of information. Rather, it is a very practical book, dealing with real life situations of the people of God, and the teaching is given to be of spiritual help. So what help is there spiritually to know that we have been chosen by God to be saved?

(1) It gives genuine cause for **praise** (Ephesians 1:3-4). We are summoned to bless God for all the blessings we have in Christ, and the first one is that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Have you ever blessed God for this? We praise God knowing that we are Christians only because He chose us in Christ.

(2) It promotes **humility** (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). God chose me, not because of anything in me, for there is absolutely nothing in me to commend me to God. It is all and only in Christ, my 'wisdom righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. I have nothing to boast about except Christ (see also Romans 3:27, 1 Corinthians 4:7).

(3) It is a strong basis for **assurance** (Romans 8:28-30). Think about it! If your attaining to glory in any way depends upon you, you will not make it. You can be *sure* that all things will work for your good because God has a purpose which cannot fail, and part of that purpose is His predestining you. Consider also how the word 'elect' is used in the following passages to give certainty – Matthew 24:24, Luke 18:7, Romans 8:33

(4) It promotes **zeal** in the Lord's service (Acts 18:10). Many think that if you believe salvation is of God it will lead Christians to do nothing in evangelism. Yet it is precisely the opposite! It is because God has chosen a people that I am encouraged, at the Lord's command, to go and find them. This is what encouraged Paul to continue in Corinth. It actually encouraged our Lord Himself when He was rejected in Galilee (Matthew 11:20-30). Our Lord had no problem in putting in one sentence the teaching that there is a chosen people given by God to Him, and also the demand for faith (John 6:37).