

"MAJOR VIEWPOINTS ON ELECTION"

(Romans 8:29-30)

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The doctrine of election forms one of the bases of salvation though it is not the only one. Other doctrines such as the death of Christ, faith, efficacious grace, and regeneration may also properly be termed bases as well. All are necessary in bringing to fruition the plan of God for the salvation of people.

Foresight Election

This view holds that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith. "By election we mean that sovereign act of God in grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those whom He foreknew would accept Him" (Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], p. 344; though this definition was not allowed to stand in Doerksen's revision, 1981, p. 258). It is probably true to say that a great majority of evangelicals consciously or unconsciously hold this concept of election. God looked down the corridor of time and in His foreknowledge saw who would accept Christ and then elected them to salvation. This makes foreknowledge foresight without any pretemporal elective action on God's part.

Corporate Election

A form of this view was held by Karl Barth. He taught that election is primarily election of Christ, then the election of the community, and finally the election of individuals. Actually all are elect in Christ, though unbelievers do not yet know that. This is why Barth's doctrine of election caused him to be accused of universalism.

An evangelical form of this same concept (perhaps in some cases influenced by Barth and in some cases not) views election as the choosing of the group, the church, in Christ, but not of individuals until after they become members of the group by faith. In the evangelical form there is no suggestion of universalism, though the idea of corporate election is common to both. We cannot speak of individuals being elected before the foundation of the world but only of the church being so elected in Christ (Eph. 1:4). When an individual believes in Christ, he is placed in the elect group and then he can be said to be elect. "What did God choose before the foundation of the world? The church. Not individuals, but the body of Christ" (Dan Esterline, "The Doctrine of Predestination," *Moody Monthly*, February 1979, p. 86; for the same view see also Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* [Wheaton: Tyndale, 1975], and Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* [Springfield, Mo.: Westcott, 1970], pp. 48-9).

Individual, Pretemporal Election

In this viewpoint election is "that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941], p. 114). Thus election is unconditional (i.e., there is nothing in the creature that conditions God's choice), pretemporal (before the foundation of the world), unmerited (i.e., of grace), and the basis of salvation. Those who hold this view also acknowledge that election is in Christ, but they mean that He is the ground and cause and guarantee of the election of individuals. They reject the corporate election concept, insisting rather that God elected individuals (and not on the basis of foresight), and those elect individuals form the group, the church.

