

Chosen and choice

Introduction

Are we chosen by God and do we have choice in the matter of salvation?

Which is right Calvinism or Arminianism or is there another way?

I hope to bring a reliable, fully biblical, answer, based on the premise that the scripture is God-breathed and without contradiction. Every single verse must fit together perfectly - rather like a jig-saw and sometimes it is a puzzle! Until the Holy Spirit reveals all.

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Chapter 1

The nature of salvation

You must be born again

There should be no disagreement over the need to be born again. Jesus explicitly says so:

'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' John 3:3

He also tells us how this is accomplished: Firstly:

'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.' John 3:5

This verse tells us two things – one must first be born naturally (that He describes as being born of the flesh) and spiritually (which He describes as being born of the Spirit.)

He also tells us how this is accomplished: Secondly:

'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:16

Jesus came for salvation, not for condemnation.

'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' John 3: 17-18

'Belief' here clearly implies much more than mental assent to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God - even the devil understands that! So belief carries the meaning of 'placing one's trust in.'

So, 'he who believes' would be placing his trust in Jesus as his Saviour - through the wonderful exchange of Him taking the penalty of my sin, and in exchange, giving me the gift of righteousness.

'For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.'

Romans 5:17

Here we can now see two realms or kingdoms. In one kingdom death reigned, in the other kingdom Jesus reigns.

We all start life in the kingdom of darkness – we all need to be born again. Once born again then ...

'We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren' 1 John 3:14

Chapter 2

Chosen to bear fruit

'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.'
John 15:16

Jesus is speaking to His disciples after washing their feet. He tells them that He will be with them a little longer and then He is going to the Father to prepare a place for them.

In this context He tells them that they did not choose Him but that He chose them for the purpose of bearing lasting fruit. When we read the scriptures in the gospel verses that tell of Jesus picking out His disciples, it is very clear that He chose them and not the other way round!

The Greek *'eklego,'* which is the root of the word 'chose' in both uses in our verse above, has the meaning of picking or choosing out for oneself. When Jesus says He chose them it has that meaning – He picked them out. (See also John 6:70 and 13:18)

You can read the full discourse in which this verse appears in John's gospel chapters 13 through to 17. When He had finished instructing them they left and went across the Brook Kidron to the garden where soldiers came to arrest Jesus.

For the purpose of fruit bearing we are picked out - chosen.

Chapter 3

Predestined – the Reform view.

The reform or Calvinist view is that our salvation is utterly and entirely the work and choice of the Lord and that we have absolutely no part to play in it.

I was introduced to their concept of 5 principal elements of doctrine under the acronym TULIP by a reform minister. Here are the 5 doctrines:

T Total depravity of man – based on Romans 3:11-18 (Here Paul is actually quoting OT scriptures and goes on to comment on them – saying they are addressed to those under law making all guilty before God, with no justification through the flesh) Calvinism interprets this to mean that man is so totally depraved that he is incapable of accepting God's invitation to salvation through Jesus. This great leap of doctrine is not justified by the text, which is saying that both Jew and Gentile, that is everyone, is under sin. This is interpreted as total depravity without any possibility of doing anything good ever, at all. Therefore salvation must be a totally sovereign work of God without any part to play by the one being saved – result, the doctrine says, is that only those predestined to be saved can be saved. These then are the elect under Calvinism.

Because of this, reform doctrine says man does not have free will, and they say 'free will' is not in the bible. (The word 'Trinity' is not in the bible but we readily, and correctly, believe in a triune God because the identities of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are clearly seen in scripture.)

So we would have to ask ourselves – is the concept of choice, that is the exercise of free will, found in the scripture?

Right from the beginning we see the exercise of choice – Eve chooses to take the fruit of the tree of life. Cain chooses to kill his brother Able. Noah chose to obey God by building an ark, thus saving his family. Abraham chooses to obey God and leave Haran. David chose to disobey by taking Bathsheba and disposing of Uriah. And so on and so on right through scripture choices for good or for bad are made. Free will is demonstrated in the text from beginning to end.

Joshua challenges the Israelites, *'choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve'* Chapter 24:15

In the New Testament we are constantly urged to lead a holy and righteous life by putting off the old and putting on the new – exercise your will. Make good decisions and choices.

Paul tells us, in Romans 1 verses 18 to 24, that although God is known to all, and is clearly seen in creation, nevertheless the ungodly preferred (that is choice) darkness because their deeds were evil. He says these have no excuse. This is a statement regarding having choice, as opposed to, not having choice because God made them to fail with no chance. However the concept that God made them expressly to fail with no opportunity is not confirmed in scripture. The Lord God expresses His wish clearly in 2 Peter 3:9 – He is *'not willing that any should perish.'*

The fact that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, including unbelievers, is clearly stated by John, *'And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.'* 1 John 2:2. Everyone has the opportunity of salvation.

U Unconditional election – Calvinism says, God has predestined some to salvation and others to destruction. Purely God's choice and nothing you can do about it. Based on Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 1:4-5.

So let's look at these passages:

'For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn of many brethren.' So what we have here is a statement that believers, the foreknown ones, will be, bit by bit, conformed to the image of Jesus – this is confirmed in other scriptures – 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 1:6 for example. So we, who are believers, will definitely, eventually, be conformed to His image.

One key word is foreknowledge. The word predestination is 'predestination to become like Jesus,' not predestination to be eternally saved. Foreknowledge is the key - the Lord knows from the beginning of time who will believe and who will not. There is no element of surprise for Him.

'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' Ephesians 1:4 This is God's omniscience – knowing everything from beginning to end and end to beginning - nothing, but nothing takes God by surprise. He knows those who will make the right choice so they are the picked out ones – the elect.

So we can safely conclude that, with His foreknowledge, He picks out (chooses) those He knows will respond. That does not affect the fact that everyone has the opportunity – God knows who will accept and who won't.

We can see His desire for mankind from other scriptures – *'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count*

slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' 1 Peter 3:9 Our gracious God gives plenty of time for repentance.

If predestination meant predestined to be saved then surely and logically, if God is not willing that any should perish as stated by Peter, then He would predestine everyone for salvation in accordance with His declared desire that none should perish. However, Peter realises that there is choice for us to come to repentance or not.

So, in summary, we can agree with the fact that God chooses (or elects – same word in Greek) – but that is in His foreknowledge of who will respond – these are then called the elect.

L Limited atonement – Calvinism says Jesus only atoned for the sins of those who are predestined to salvation. This concept goes against the very nature of God who is loving and kind before He is judgemental. It also contradicts 1 John 2:2 which we read above. *'And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.'* We should emphasise here 'not ours only but also for the whole world' – which is expressly denied in Calvinism, who, by adding concepts not in the scripture, try to find a way round the God breathed truth in order to justify their position.

I Irresistible grace - Calvinism interprets John 6:44

'No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him,' as meaning that, God in drawing to Himself, is irresistible – thus it is called irresistible grace. We know from our study so far that the Father picks out those for salvation in foreknowledge. John 12:32 uses the same word for draw when referring to Jesus drawing all to Himself on the cross. This act of immense grace by

Jesus was, and is, clearly not irresistible – many see Him and refuse.

Thus Calvinism again says that man has no free will. But scripture tells us grace has to be received – look again at Romans 5:17

*'For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who **receive** abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.'*

Receive, in Greek, is '*lambano*' which means 'to take hold of.' The gift is freely offered – it requires that we take hold of it.

I have been unable to find any scripture to support the concept of 'irresistible' grace.

P Perseverance - Calvinism states that those who are predestined to salvation will persevere and that any who fall away obviously were not predestined for salvation in the first place. Harsh! And no way back! Rather we are to pray for those who slip and to restore our brethren –

'If anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.' James 5:19-20

Paul has to deal with a serious situation in the Corinthian church - so serious that he advises them, '*deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*' 1 Corinthians 5:5 His spirit saved - no loss of eternal salvation here!

So we have covered the first element of Calvinist or Reform predestination - it is not predestined to be saved but it is predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ once saved.

Calvinism states that those who are truly saved are kept by God and thus eternally secure - we would heartily agree with that statement, as it is expressly stated by the apostle Peter in his first letter, chapter 1 and verse 5 that believers are eternally secure. Paul also agrees by stating our salvation is guaranteed in Ephesians 1:13, and 4:30 and 2nd Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5.

Now the second element -

Predestination Ephesians 1:4-5

'Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.'

We have already dealt with the first aspect – picking us out in His foreknowledge for eternal salvation. Now what about adoption as sons?

Here we will quote from Vines Expository Dictionary. 'God does not adopt believers as children; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith. (Being born again) Adoption is a term involving the dignity of the relation of believers as sons; it is not a putting into the family by spiritual birth, but a putting into the position of sons.'

It is this putting into position in the family that is predestined – not our salvation.

Chapter 4

Choice - the Arminian view

The following paragraphs (taken from *Romans: An Interpretive Outline*, by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas) give a clear summary of the Arminian view along the lines what was presented to the National Synod in Dordrecht, Holland in 1618. *I have added comments in this type face.*

- *Free-will or human ability.* Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe but does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists in his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God's Spirit and be regenerated or resist God's grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit's assistance but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man's act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the

sinner's gift to God; it is man's contribution to salvation.

Actually the scripture confirms this by stating that Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness. i.e. Abraham's faith came before the gift of righteousness. Genesis 15:6

One can also consider the fact that angels clearly had free will – about a third chose to follow the devil in his rebellion.

- *Conditional election.* God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the Gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw, and upon which He based His choice, was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their

own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner's choice of Christ—not God's choice of the sinner—is the ultimate cause of salvation.

- *Universal redemption or general atonement.* Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

We have earlier already quoted the scripture that supports this view. Jesus sacrifice also made the way for the redemption of the creation which had been subjected to bondage at the fall. Romans 8:18-22. By limiting redemption to only the predestined elect Calvinism loses sight of the magnitude of Jesus sacrifice.

- *The Holy Spirit can be effectually resisted.* The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation. He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can

successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be— and often is—resisted and thwarted by man.

*Scripture confirms that the Holy Spirit can be resisted
– do not quench the Spirit. Do not grieve the Spirit.
1 Thessalonians 5:19 and Ephesians 4:25-32*

We can also consider the rich young ruler of Matthew 19:16-22. He comes wanting eternal life, but chooses to go away sorrowful rather than accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him.

- *Falling from grace.* Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc.

According to Arminianism, salvation is accomplished through the combined efforts of God (who takes the initiative) and man (who

must respond); man's response being the determining factor. God has provided salvation for everyone, but His provision becomes effective only for those who, of their own free will, choose to cooperate with Him and accept His offer of grace. At the crucial point, man's will plays a decisive role; thus man, not God, determines who will be recipients of the gift of salvation.

For clarity – God's initiative is an act of grace. We are saved by grace. We do not have the power of saving ourselves. Our 'power' is restricted to accepting God's invitation to salvation or not.

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.' Ephesians 2:8-9

Chapter 5

Another way - The fully biblical view

So now we can take the five main points covered above and make a fully biblical conclusion.

1 All men are confined under sin and utterly unable to redeem themselves. Just as Abram (later called Abraham) placed trust in what God told him to do, and that was credited to him as righteousness; in the same way when the Spirit brings to us understanding of what Jesus has done, and we place our trust (believe,) so we are then born again and made righteous. We have seen that the scriptures advises against quenching and grieving the Spirit, which is what unbelievers do by preferring darkness.

Conclusion: Man is helpless to save himself. God offers salvation through faith in Jesus. Man either takes hold of the offered gift or does not according to his own choice.

2 We have concluded that election is in God's foreknowledge of whether or not an individual responds to His offer. This agrees with the fact that the scripture, and indeed life, abounds with choice and choices to make.

3 We take the position that the scripture clearly states that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world and not just for the elect – though clearly only those who believe benefit.

4 We see from scripture that our salvation is a gift in the grace of God offered to us by the Holy Spirit that has to be received. Anyone familiar with operating in the gifts of the Spirit knows that one always has the choice to receive or to fail to receive the gift being offered.

5 Scripture urges perseverance. At the same time it acknowledges that we fail from time to time. This is clearly stated in 1 John. *'If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'* Chapter 1:8-9

John also states, that the part of us that is born of God (that would be our born again human spirit), cannot sin. This, he says, is because His seed remains in us. We saw that Paul confirms that our salvation is guaranteed.

So we safely conclude that we cannot lose our eternal salvation.

(This is one aspect of salvation [which by the way has the meaning of 'deliverance from danger'] We are also urged in scripture to work out with fear and trembling our salvation – this can only mean the salvation of body and soul as we have seen that the salvation of our human spirit is beyond any human capability. Salvation of the body and soul is a different matter all together.)

Appendix

Favour

I have added some thoughts about the favour of God to illustrate His good intentions for mankind. Good intentions that come His grace and mercy.

Right from the beginning the Lord God blessed mankind and intended blessing for mankind.

Having created man in His own image God blessed them saying, *'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over every living thing that moves on the earth.'* Genesis 1;28

So mankind starts with God's blessing. However, by exercising wrong choices he loses his position to the serpent. Now the earth will only bear its fruit alongside thorns and thistles – man will live by the sweat of his brow.

In this first stage of history man became only sinful – except for Noah, who found favour with God. The flood was the result of man's sin. But God provided a way of escape for Noah – build an ark – take your family and some of every living creature. The flood lasted a long time (a year and eleven days). Eventually the dove Noah sends out returns with an olive leaf in its mouth and he knows the flood is abating. The Lord God tells him to leave the ark and life starts over again.

However, man is at it again – this time building a tower so high that should God flood the earth again man would be safe - God scatters man abroad by confusing their languages.

The Lord God speaks to Abraham, whose expression of faith is counted to him for righteousness.

Abraham begets Isaac, and Isaac begets Jacob, and Jacob has 12 sons who form the tribes of Israel. Israel is promised immense blessing. Just keep the Law given through Moses. But the Law is a perfect expression of holiness and man cannot achieve it. (Actually that was the point. We know from the New Testament that the Law was given as a tutor showing the need of the Messiah and the way to Him.)

Israel swings between following the Lord and following other Gods over the years and under various kings.

At the due time the Messiah arrives – exactly on time. But the spiritual leaders of Israel reject Him.

Paul tells the Romans, in chapter eleven, that Israel was cut off from the immense blessing of the Olive Tree root for unbelief and that gentiles, even though wild, were grafted in through faith.

The gentile nations were at the same time given the warning - they too could be cut off for unbelief. They were also warned not to boast against the natural branches (Israel) and no to be haughty.

Regretfully we see rising anti Semitism. Judgement will surely follow. Not because God wants to judge – He wants to bless. But men prefer darkness and will pay the price for that in due course.

Favour

We see the Lord's intention from the beginning – blessing intended for Adam.

Blessing for Noah.

Blessing promised to Abraham.

Blessing offered to Israel

Gentiles grafted in to the Olive Tree root of fatness.

The Lord wants to bless - so He made the way our sinfulness could be taken away and exchanged for righteousness – by belief in Jesus.

Favour is ours to enjoy. Now we receive favour as we learn that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

That is another story and dealt with in some of the booklets listed below:

Particularly –

Favour, enjoying the children's bread

Hearing God speak

Faith or presumption.

Other titles:

The ICCC – Transformed Working Life series:

Inherent Power
Work is a 1st class calling
No one can serve two masters
Hope - the certainty of future blessing
Faith or presumption
Hearing God speak
Working from rest
Renewing the mind
Be strong in the battle
Anointing
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Works of power - now is the time
Stand tall - take your position

Other publications

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Going for Gold – the testing and stretching of our faith
After Brexit – the nature of the battle ahead
Last Orders
Wisdom
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