

THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE ELECTION RECONSIDERED: ELECTION TO SERVICE, NOT TO EVERLASTING LIFE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Because of the strong influence of Calvinism in Evangelicalism today, the doctrine of election has been widely understood to concern one's eternal destiny. Those whom God elected will spend eternity with the Lord. Those whom God did not elect will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

While some find this doctrine to be disturbing, since humans seemingly have nothing at all to do with where they will spend eternity, others find this doctrine liberating. After all, many feel that if their eternal destiny has been predetermined by God and they can do nothing to change that, then they can relax and rest in whatever God decided.

There have always been people who questioned the Calvinist understanding of election *on philosophical grounds*. How could God be good if He created beings with no opportunity to escape an eternity of eternal torment? Indeed, if we believe that only a small percentage of humanity will avoid eternal condemnation, as Calvinism teaches, then the goodness and fairness of God is even more in question. But this a philosophical or theological approach, not a Biblical one.

If the Scriptures teach that God elected some to everlasting life and either bypassed most or elected them to eternal torment, then we should embrace that as true even if we neither like it nor understand it. What God says is true. We don't make it true by liking or understanding it.

In this article we will consider the Biblical doctrine of election. My thesis is that election is not about eternal destiny, but about service and eternal reward. God has chosen a nation, a city, a Person, and many individuals to serve and glorify Him both now and in the life to come.

II. THE CALVINIST VIEW

The U in TULIP stands for *unconditional election*. What the Calvinist means by this is that God chose to save a small portion of humanity. The rest he did not choose to save.

In the updated and expanded edition of *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented*, Steele, Thomas, and Quinn define unconditional election as follows:

The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save...His eternal choice of particular sinners for salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will.¹

They then go on to discuss those not elected:

Those who were not chosen for salvation were passed by and left to their own evil and choices. It is not within the creature's jurisdiction to call into question the justice of the Creator for not choosing everyone for salvation. It is enough to know that the Judge of the earth has done right.²

As they are clear to point out, God's choice of a small portion of humanity and not of the vast majority had nothing to do with those chosen (e.g., foreseen faith, works, character, etc.). That is what is meant by *unconditional*.

¹David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1963, 2004), 27.

²*Ibid.*, 27-28.

R. C. Sproul speaks of the unconditional nature of election in this way:

When we say that election is unconditional we mean the original decree of God by which he chooses some people to be saved is not dependent upon some future condition in us that God foresees. There is nothing in us that God could foresee that would induce him to choose us. The only thing he would foresee in the lives of fallen creatures left to themselves would be sin. God chooses us simply according to the good pleasure of his will.³

In this view one's eternal destiny is predetermined before he is even born. Whether he goes to the kingdom or the lake of fire has nothing to do with him. It is based solely on God's choice. If he is one of the chosen few, then he will be in the kingdom no matter what. If he is not, then he will not be in the kingdom no matter what. There is no free will in this matter. It is a bit misleading of Steele, Thomas, and Quinn to say, "Those who were not chosen for salvation were passed by and left to their own evil *and choices*" (emphasis added). The non-elect according to Calvinism have no choices to make. Calvinists believe in the bondage of the will.

Some non-Calvinists suggest that such a view of election is capricious and arbitrary. Yet Calvinists suggest that while it has nothing to do with the one chosen, the choice is still not arbitrary. Here is how Sproul explains it:

It was not a blind draw because God is not blind. Yet we must still insist that it was nothing that he foreknew, foresaw, or foreloved in us that was the decisive reason for his choice.⁴

In the Calvinist view, the elect will eventually be born again and once they are, they are secure forever. However, Calvinists also say that the ones who are *truly elect* will prove it by persevering in faith and works until death. Steele, Thomas, and Quinn put it this way:

³R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 156.

⁴Ibid.

Insufficient emphasis is given to God's requirement that *we must persevere to the end* in a life that seeks after holiness.

We are convinced that there will be many who think that heaven is certain and will realize too late that their sense of security in Christ was actually a false hope. While they acknowledged Christ as their savior, their lives did not reflect a genuine relationship with Him, and consequently they were still dead in their sins. There was no perseverance, no running of the race to the end, only a mere profession made years earlier.

One could almost speak of the six points of Calvinism, the *fifth* point being the *preservation* of the saints and the *sixth* point being the *perseverance* of the saints.⁵

Thus no Calvinist knows if He is elect (or if Christ died for him, since the U and L in TULIP are inextricably linked). Calvinists must look to their imperfect works to have some degree of confidence that they will indeed persevere to the end and hence prove to be one of the elect. Of course, if they are not elect, then they will not be able to persevere, no matter how hard they try. But if they are elect, then they will fight to the end and they will then be allowed to enter into the kingdom of God.

III. OTHER VIEWS OF ELECTION UNTO EVERLASTING LIFE

A. FORESEEN FAITH

Jacobus Arminius didn't agree with the Calvinist view of election. He felt it was a fatalistic view that totally eliminated any human response to the gospel. Thus he proposed a different understanding of election.

Concerning predestination and election Arminius wrote:

VII. This doctrine is repugnant to the Nature of God, but particularly to those Attributes of his

⁵ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 148-49.

nature by which he performs and manages all things, his wisdom, justice, and goodness.

VIII. Such a doctrine of Predestination is contrary to the nature of man, in regard to his having been created after the Divine image in the knowledge of God and in righteousness, in regard to his having been created with freedom of will, and in regard to his having been created with a disposition and aptitude for the enjoyment of life eternal.

IX. This Predestination is diametrically opposed to the Act of Creation.

X. This doctrine is at open hostility with the Nature of Eternal Life, and the titles by which it is signally distinguished in the Scriptures.⁶

A leading Arminian view is that God looked ahead to see which people He wanted to choose. He chose based on something in the people chosen. Some Arminians might say that He saw in advance that we would freely come to faith in Christ. Other Arminians might say that He saw in advance that we would turn from our sins, commit our lives to Christ, and follow Him. In any case, He foresaw something in us that caused Him to choose us.⁷ R. C. Sproul says:

The vast majority of Christians who reject the Reformed view of predestination adopt what is sometimes called the prescient or foreknowledge (pre-science, prior knowledge) view of predestination. Briefly stated, this view teaches that from all eternity God knew how we would live. He knew in advance whether we would receive Christ or reject Christ. He knew our free choices before we ever made them. God' choice of

⁶ Cited by Danilo Carvalho (http://dufreire.wordpress.com/2008/04/25/jacobus-arminius%E2%80%99-contribution-christian-understanding-of-salvation-in-light-of-christian-holiness/#_ftn17). Accessed September 8, 2012. Taken from J. Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, volume I. Pages 619-39 cover all twenty of the points Carvalho discusses.

⁷ See Kevin Jackson's article, "An Explanation of Simple Foreknowledge" at <http://evangelicalarminians.org/?q=node/1285>. Accessed September 8, 2012.

our eternal destiny then was made on the basis of what he knew we would choose. He chooses us because he knows in advance that we would choose him. The elect, then, are those who God knows will choose Christ freely.⁸

In Arminianism a person chosen might not make it into the kingdom. Choosing just means that you will be born again and that you have a chance to keep it.

According to Arminianism, Christ died for all and hence all have a chance. If they respond properly, they will be someone that God foresaw would respond, and they will have been chosen.

B. CORPORATE ELECTION

Some Arminians and some who call themselves neither Calvinists nor Arminians hold to what is called *corporate election*. It is based in great part on Eph 1:4: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

The Society for Evangelical Arminians says:

Election in Christ is primarily corporate, i.e., an election of a people (Eph 1:4-5, 7, 9). The elect are called “the body of Christ” (4:12), “my church” (Mt 16:18), “a people belonging to God” (1 Pe 2:9), and the “bride” of Christ (Rev 19:7). Therefore, election is corporate and embraces individual persons only as they identify and associate themselves with the body of Christ, the true church.⁹

Jesus is chosen. Then, whoever comes to faith in Jesus becomes chosen because they are a part of the Body of Christ, the Church.

This view rejects the idea of individual election for eternal life. Instead, Jesus is chosen as the King and all who believe in Him become part of the body that will be in the kingdom of the King.

⁸ Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 129.

⁹ See <http://evangelicalarminians.org/A-Concise-Summary-of-the-Corporate-View-of-Election-and-Predestination>. Accessed November 8, 2012.

C. ELECTION CONDITIONED ON UNKNOWN FACTORS

According to modified Calvinism, God chose some and not others, but His choice was not arbitrary. Nor did He choose based on who would believe, since hypothetically everyone would believe if God kept turning up the heat.

Harlan Betz posits a view of election that is somewhere between Calvinism and Arminianism. He describes it in this way:

God elects a man without regard to that man's merit! In fact, man cannot merit God's saving grace! Election is an act of God's grace (Eph. 1:4-6). Believing is a response to God's grace. The Bible teaches both God's sovereignty in choosing and man's responsibility in believing. The Bible places foreknowledge before predestination (Rom. 8:28-30). God desires for all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). God is not desirous that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Whosoever believes in Jesus has eternal life (John 3:16)! Men who go to Hell, go there because they are sinners who rejected God's grace.¹⁰

In this view, God chose based on knowing the people in advance. His sovereign choice was not inconsistent with man's ability and responsibility to believe in Jesus for everlasting life. God's choice does have some free will aspect to it since God takes our free-will into account when choosing.

IV. THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF ELECTION: ELECTION IS TO MINISTRY

The doctrine of election, even minus limited atonement, didn't make too much sense to me when I was taught it in seminary. But most of my professors taught that this was a mystery which we could not fully understand. All are able to believe in Jesus, I was taught (contrary to the strict Calvinist understanding of election), since Christ died for all (DTS taught unlimited atonement). However, only the elect will believe. It is not that God forces the elect to believe, or keeps the non-elect from believing,

¹⁰ See "Calvinism vs. Biblicism vs. Arminianism" at http://www.lostpines-biblechurch.com/docs/Calvinism_Biblicism_Arminianism.pdf. Accessed November 8, 2012.

it is simply that all who freely believe happen to be the elect and all who freely reject Christ happen to be the non-elect.

That eliminated some concerns I had. But it still didn't make a lot of sense. I remember thinking something like, *Well, this makes the most sense of anything I've heard till now. However, I keep studying and will remain open. Possibly there is a better explanation of what this doctrine of election is.*

Over the past 10 to 15 years I've been studying the Biblical references to God's choosing and electing people. What I have found is far different from what I was taught.

When we study the Biblical words for election and choosing (*eklektos, eklegomai, eklogē, hairtizō, haireomai, procheririzō, proskaleō, suneklektos*), what we find is radically different than what is commonly taught about election. When the Bible teaches about God choosing individuals, a nation, and even a city, it speaks of divine choice *for ministry*, not for eternal destiny. The Biblical doctrine of election is not about who will spend eternity with the Lord and who will not. It is about ministries that people are chosen to do for the Lord.

A. GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE, ISRAEL

The Old and New Testaments both make it clear that the Jews are God's *chosen people* and *the elect* (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 1 Kgs 3:8; Pss 33:12; 106:5; Isa 43:10; 45:4; 65:9, 22; Matt 24:22, 31; Mark 13:20; Luke 18:7; Rom 9:11; 11:28; 2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 2:4). They were chosen to be the line through which Messiah came. Israel was chosen to serve God in its practices and in its worship. Indeed, God has not given up on Israel. By the end of the Tribulation, Israel will cry out to the Lord Jesus and will be delivered. During the Millennium, and then on the new earth, Israel will serve God forever in its practices and praise.

Due to the bias toward the Calvinist understanding of who *the elect* are, many of the references to Israel as *the elect* in the NT are misunderstood. If the NT follows and is built upon the OT, then it should not be surprising that both testaments refer to Israel as God's chosen, His elect.

B. JESUS, GOD'S CHOSEN MESSIAH AND SAVIOR

Jesus Himself is *the chosen one, the elect*. He was chosen by God the Father to be the chief cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4, 6), to be

the Messiah (Isa 42:1-4; 49:7; Matt 12:18; Luke 9:35; 23:35; John 1:34), and to die on the cross for our sins (Matt 12:18; 1 Pet 2:4).

C. TWELVE MEN CHOSEN AS CHRIST'S APOSTLES

Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples and apostles (Luke 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19; Acts 1:2). When one of those, Judas, betrayed Jesus, his place was taken by another man chosen by God, Matthias (Acts 1:24-26).

One Greek word used for choosing was used of the election of the twelve: *eklegomai* (Luke 6:13; 15:16, 19).

D. SAUL CHOSEN AS APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Saul of Tarsus was later chosen by God to be an apostle as well, specifically the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15 [*eklogē*]; 13:2 [*prokaleō*]; 22:14-15 [*procheirizō*]).

E. PETER CHOSEN TO TAKE THE GOSPEL TO CORNELIUS

Peter was chosen by God to be the one to take the gospel to Cornelius and his household, the first group of Gentile converts (Acts 15:7 [*eklegomai*]).

F. GOD'S CHOSEN DELIVERER, MOSES

God chose Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and to the Promised Land (Num 16:5-6 [*bhr*]).

G. GOD'S CHOSEN PRIESTLY LINE, LEVI

God chose (*bhr*) Aaron and the tribe of Levi to be the priestly line (Num 17:5; 1 Sam 2:28; 2 Chron 29:11). God chose (*bhr*) that priests from the tribe of Levi would minister before Him in the temple and would be paid by the tithes of the people (Deut 18:5-8; 21:5; 1 Chron 15:2).

H. MEN CHOSEN TO BE IN MESSIAH'S LINE

Specifically God chose (*bhr*) Abraham (Neh 9:7), Isaac, Jacob (Ps 135:4; Isa 41:8; Ezek 20:5), and Judah (1 Chron 28:4; Ps 78:67) to be in the line of Messiah.

DAVID CHOSEN TO REPLACE SAUL AS KING

He chose (*bhr*) David to replace King Saul and to be in the line of Messiah (2 Sam 6:21; 1 Kings 8:16; 1 Chron 28:4; 2 Chron 6:6; Ps 89:3).

J. GOD CHOSE SOLOMON TO SUCCEED DAVID AS KING

God chose (*bhr*) Solomon over David's other sons to be king (1 Chron 29:1).

K. GOD CHOSE MARY AND JOSEPH

God's choosing went right down to Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:30, 42-45, 48), and Joseph, the husband of Mary (Matt 1:20).¹¹

L. GOD'S CHOSEN CITY, JERUSALEM

Over and over again God reminds His people that Jerusalem was and will forever be God's chosen city (e.g., Deut 15:20; 16:2, 15; 1 Kings 8:44; 11:13; 14:21; 2 Kings 21:7; 23:27; 2 Chron 6:6, 34; 12:13; 33:7; Neh 1:9; Ps 132:13; Zech 3:2).

M. CHOSEN SOJOURNERS

In his first epistle Peter wrote to Jewish believers scattered around the Roman Empire. He called them *elect* (or *chosen*) *sojourners*. Though many versions translate 1 Pet 1:2 as "elect according to foreknowledge," the word *elect* (*eklektos*) actually occurs in v 1 immediately before *sojourners*.

V. ELECTION IS NEVER CONCERNING ONE'S ETERNAL DESTINY

Admittedly, it is hard to prove a negative. However, there simply is not a single verse in the OT or NT that speaks of anyone being chosen or elected to everlasting life, to justification, to salvation from eternal condemnation, or any synonymous idea.

The verse most often cited to prove election unto everlasting life, Acts 13:48, does indeed mention everlasting life. But it

¹¹ N.B. No word which we translate *choosing* or *election* is use of Mary or Joseph. Yet the *concept* of their choosing is evident in the texts cited.

doesn't mention election, choosing, or any synonym for election or choosing.

That simple fact is often overlooked. The verse in question is Acts 13:48. It reads, "As many as had been appointed to everlasting life believed" (NKJV, ESV, NASB; NIV reads "appointed for everlasting life"). The participle (*tetagmenoi*) translated *as many as had been appointed* is from the verb *tassō*. There is no dispute on the fact that there is not a single other verse in the entire Bible where this word refers to any sort of election, let alone divine election to everlasting life. That alone should cause us to wonder if Calvinists have made something of this verse it is not. If *tassō* refers to election here,¹² it is the only place it does.¹³

Acts 13:48 is not the first time in the passage that everlasting life is mentioned. To understand v 48, one must first consider v 46. It reads, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." The Jews in Pisidian Antioch "were filled with envy" and "they opposed the things spoken by Paul" in their synagogue. Note how Paul explains this: "you...judge yourselves unworthy of

¹² NIDNTT says: "Several words are used in the NT to express appointment. The following are dealt with in this article: *kathistēmi*, *horizō*, *paristēmi*, *procheirizō*, *tassō*, *tithēmi*, *prothesmia*, *cheirotoneō*, and *lanchnō*" (1:471). The article on *tassō* is written by Calvinist J. I. Packer. He says that *tassō* "denotes God's appointment of 'the powers that be' (Rom. 13:1), of a career of service for Paul (Acts 22:10), and of individual persons to attain eternal life through believing the gospel (Acts 13:48)" (1:476). That explanation of Acts 13:48 seems out of place with the explanation given of Rom 13:1 and Acts 22:10, and it fails to take into account that a middle passive participle is used in Acts 13:48.

In addition, Packer sounds like he is saying that faith in the gospel is the way in which one is regenerated. Yet most Calvinists say that regeneration precedes faith. See, for example, Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 72. Sproul says, "A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: 'Regeneration precedes faith.'" A bit later [p. 73 top] he adds, "We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order that we might believe."

¹³ The reason this was translated in this way in the first place is likely the influence of Calvinist thought. There is a bit of circular reasoning that occurs here. People posit that the Calvinist doctrine of election is true because of Acts 13:48. Yet they know that Acts 13:48 is talking about election to everlasting life because the Calvinist doctrine of divine election is a proven fact. If the Calvinist doctrine of election is not a given, then it is hard to see how anyone would find proof of such a doctrine in Acts 13:46-48. Indeed, the opposite is clearly suggested.

everlasting life.” Paul does not say, *You show that God did not elect you to everlasting life.*

Clearly vv 46 and 48 are antithetically parallel. Verse 46 is Paul’s words to the unbelieving Jews in Pisidian Antioch. Verse 48 is Luke’s words concerning the believing Gentiles (and possibly Jews) there. The former group did not receive everlasting life because it judged itself unworthy of it. The latter group did receive everlasting life.

Why did the latter group believe? Clearly in some sense the latter people judged themselves worthy of everlasting life, unlike the Jews who rejected the promise of life.

But what then does *tetagmenoi* mean here? One of the major views is that it refers to unconditional election. If so, this would be the only place in the Bible which speaks of election *to everlasting life.*

Henry Alford suggested that understanding is forced:

48. [**tetagmenoi**] The meaning of this word must be determined by the context. The Jews had *judged themselves unworthy of eternal life* [v 46]; the Gentiles, **as many as were disposed to eternal life** [v 48], believed. *By whom* so disposed is not *here* declared; nor need the word be in this place further particularized. *We know that it is God who worketh in us the will to believe* and that the preparation of the heart is of Him; but to find *in this text* pre-ordination to life asserted is to force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain.¹⁴

BDAG says the verb *tassō* means “to bring about an order of things by arranging, *arrange, put in place*” and “to give instructions as to what must be done, *order, fix, determine, appoint.*”¹⁵ It lists Acts 13:48 under the first meaning, under a second sub-heading entitled, “of a person put into a specific position, used with a preposition.”¹⁶ It suggest that *tassō* in Acts 13:48 means “*belong to, be classed among those possessing.*”¹⁷

¹⁴ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, Vol. II: The Acts of the Apostles, The Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians, fifth edition (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1865), 153, italics and bold his.

¹⁵ BDAG, 991 (meanings 1 and 2 of 2).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Tassō is only used eight times in the NT. The closest other use is the same exact participle except that it is feminine and not masculine. In Rom 13:1 *tetagemenai* occurs and means “put in place by.”¹⁸ However, in that context God is specifically mentioned as the one putting the governing authorities in place (*hupo tou Theou tetagemenai eisin*).

Comparing Rom 13:1 and Acts 13:48 might imply that God is not the one who put them in place since the text does not say *tetagemenoi hupo tou Theou*. However, even if He is, as Alford points out, that does not in this context suggest that “pre-ordination to life” is meant.¹⁹

In 1 Cor 16:15 Paul speaks of those who “have devoted [*etaxan*, from *tassō*] themselves to the ministry of the saints.”

The whole phrase means that these Gentiles, unlike the unbelieving Jews in v 46, positioned (or *disposed* or *devoted*) themselves toward everlasting life. Here is how I would paraphrase the sense of the word in question: *as many as inclined themselves toward everlasting life believed*. They were open. Then they believed.

Those who were closed did not believe, for they judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life (v 46).

Of course, it is true that there are a number of vague references in the epistles which merely refer to *the elect*, with no hint as to what that means. No explanation is given as to what the persons so designated were chosen to do or to be.

These verses are often used by Calvinists as proofs of election unto everlasting life. Yet the only way such verses could even be implied to be saying that is if there are other verses that clearly establish that there is such a thing as election unto everlasting life.

If the rest of the Scriptures show that election is to ministry, then we would understand vague references to *the elect* as either references to Israel or as references to believers in the church age. Either way, the issue would be divine choice for ministry for either group.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ In his commentary on Acts (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale Series [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980], 231.), I. Howard Marshall suggests that *tetagemenoi* might mean “that the Gentiles believed in virtue of the fact that God’s plan of salvation included them.”

VI. ELECT ANGELS?

Paul speaks of *elect angels* in 1 Tim 5:21. There is no doubt that he is talking about unfallen angels here. However, in what sense are the unfallen angels *elect*? Paul does not say. Evidently Timothy knew what Paul meant.

Possibly Paul means that some angels *were chosen to aid Timothy as he led the church in Ephesus* (cf. Dan 10:10-14; 12:1; Heb 1:14).

At the very least, *elect angels* refers to angels who were *chosen to serve God forever*. The basis of choosing is unstated here or anywhere in the Bible. Probably the basis of choosing was the fact that these angels did not rebel against God.

In any case, this cannot be used to support the idea of election of humans to everlasting life since angels don't have everlasting life, even the elect ones. Jesus did not die for angels and He does not offer everlasting life to angels that believe in Him. Unfallen angels simply have an eternal relationship with God.

VII. MAKE YOUR ELECTION SURE? (2 PETER 1:10-11)

Peter urges his believing readers to “make your calling and election sure” in 2 Pet 1:10. There is a hint in v 11 as to what this calling and election is to. It is to an *everlasting kingdom*. In other words, believers are invited (called) to rule with Christ forever and those who add to their faith the character qualities Peter mentions (2 Pet 1:5-8) will indeed be elected or chosen to do so.

In his commentary on Second Peter, Zane Hodges comments on election in 2 Pet 1:10 as follows:

This text does not mean that Christians are to confirm their call and election to eternal salvation. Such an idea is completely foreign to this passage. Peter has just finished addressing his readers as believers (v 1) whom God has richly endowed (vv 3-4). If the word *election* (*eklogē* = selection, choosing) referred to being chosen before time (as in Eph 1:4), it is surprising that

the phrase is not reversed: “your election and calling” (cf. Rom 8:30).

Here is one of the many verbal allusions in the Petrine epistles to the teaching Peter had heard from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: “many are called, but few are chosen [*eklektoi*]” (Matt 20:16; 22:14).

All Christians have been given a *royal summons* by God Himself, inviting them to the glorious privilege of co-reigning with Christ in the life to come (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21). But not all Christians will be *chosen* to co-reign (cf. Rom 8:17b; 2 Tim 2:12).

Peter, therefore, wishes his readership to produce in their lifestyle appropriate verification that they are royal people, destined for high honor in the coming kingdom of God.²⁰

Calvinists believe that this text is speaking of making one’s election *unto everlasting life* sure. For example, Sproul, after quoting 2 Pet 1:10-11 writes:

Here we see the mandate to make our election sure. To do so requires diligence. We have a pastoral concern here. Peter links assurance with freedom from stumbling...

Not only is it important that we gain authentic assurance but it is important that we gain it early in our Christian experience...

I never know for sure whether another person I meet is elect or not. I cannot see into other people’s souls. As human beings our view of others is restricted to outward appearances. We cannot see into the heart. The only person who can know for sure if you are elect or not is you.²¹

One wonders how any Calvinist could be sure, as Sproul suggests is possible, if the basis of certainty is our works. Indeed, Sproul goes on to say:

²⁰Zane C. Hodges, “The Second Epistle of Peter” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 2:1174.

²¹Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 168-69.

To have assurance we must make a sober analysis of our lives. It is not much use to compare ourselves with others. We will always be able to find others who are more advanced in their sanctification than we are. We may also be able to find others who are less advanced. No two people are exactly at the same point in their spiritual growth.

We must ask if we see any real change in our behavior, any real outward evidence of grace. This is a precarious process because we can lie to ourselves. It is a difficult task to perform, but by no means impossible.²²

Introspection and doubts about eternal destiny are so prevalent in Calvinist circles that some Calvinists warn about it. Steele, Thomas, and Quinn say:

Another odd pitfall that characterizes some Calvinists is chronic introspection. Now, I do not mean normal self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5). I mean the sort that goes too far. This sort seems to glory in introspection with the proper results. What do I mean? True self-examination should lead to renewed faith and love and obedience. False introspection leads to more introspection, and actually less faith. It produces more doubt, not faith. For example, some worry that they might not be among the elect. But this does not lead them to put faith in Christ. If that is the result, then it is not true self-examination.²³

The issue in 2 Pet 1:10-11 is not mere kingdom entrance, but *rich* entrance. The idea of a rich entrance fits perfectly with the idea that Peter is referring to being called or invited to rule with Christ. Those who heed the call will be chosen to rule, that is, to have the rich entrance. Those who do not, will get into the kingdom, but will not rule (cf. 1 Thess 5:10).

²² Ibid., 170-71.

²³ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 195.

VIII. CHOSEN FOR DELIVERANCE FROM THE TRIBULATION

Not all references to divine election refer to selection for ministry.

In 2 Thess 2:13 Paul says, “God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth...” The word salvation (*sōtēria*) occurs three times in First and Second Thessalonians. In its two other uses it clearly refer to deliverance from the Tribulation via the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess 5:8, 9 as compared with 5:3, “and they shall not escape”).

This probably explains 1 Thess 1:4 as well: “knowing, beloved brethren your election by God.” They were elected to salvation *from the Tribulation*.

IX. APPLICATION

Everyone and everything God chose or elected is part of the Biblical doctrine of election. It is a major error to think that the Biblical doctrine of election is about God choosing who would be born again and who would not. It is not.

There is not a shred of incontrovertible evidence that shows that God chose or elected anyone to have everlasting life. While there are some verses that I cannot yet explain to my own satisfaction (e.g., Rom 8:33; 11:5; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 5:13; 2 John 1, 13), the number is small and shrinking all the time. And none of them says or implies that God chose someone for everlasting life.

The more I have studied the words *choose* and *elect*, the more I’ve found that they refer to selection for a certain job or task.

To be clear, I am not predisposed to one position or another. What God says is true and just and good. If the Bible clearly taught that God only elected certain people to everlasting life and passed others by, I would be fine with that even if I couldn’t get my mind around it now. Indeed, that is what I believed for a decade or more from the start of my seminary training until years after I received my doctorate.

God is God and can do what He wants. Who are we to question what He does? But since He never says He elects some but

not others to everlasting life, to create and perpetuate such a doctrine ends up actually contradicting what God has said.

Of course, if God did that, then the moment we believed in Jesus for everlasting life, we would know that we are elect. That was actually my view until I came to see that the whole doctrine of election to everlasting life is mistaken.

The Reformed doctrine of election is linked to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance (the P in Calvinism's TULIP), which says that only those who persevere to the end of their lives will get into the kingdom. All other believers will be sent to hell since their faith was *merely intellectual* and was not *heart faith*. Thus the Reformed doctrine of election is sadly tied to the Reformed idea that no one can be sure of his eternal destiny till he dies. No true Calvinist will say he is sure he is born again since none can be sure he will persevere.

While the Calvinists I have met are very well intentioned, they follow an unbiblical, man-made theology that is logical, but wrong.

Practically speaking, if you believe in a Calvinistic election to everlasting life, you will be beset daily with fears about going to hell, for you cannot and will not know where you are going until you die, or until you are set free from this insidious teaching.

The English branch of the Reformation is called Puritanism. Nearly to a man, the great Puritan leaders, when they were facing death, lamented that they were probably not regenerate. The reason was simple. They did not see enough evidence in their lives to prove to them that they were elect. They believed that the only proof of election is perseverance. And the only sure proof of perseverance is perfection, which no one has (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). Hence Puritan teachers were trapped by their own teachings. As long as they stayed busy they could hold their fears somewhat in check. But once they were on death's door, those fears assaulted them terribly.

Though I've met many who say they have found great comfort in the idea that God elects some and not others to everlasting life, I do see not the evidence in what they tell me about their beliefs. They report that they are not sure that they are elect. They *hope* they are elect. They *think* that their works may show that they are elect. But they admit that they might not be elect, and if so, then they will go to hell no matter what they believe

and no matter what they do. Thus while they report finding solace in the Reformed doctrine of election, I believe they actually find distress there.

A proper understanding of divine election makes assurance of our eternal destiny possible. That in itself is a terrific application, for assurance of everlasting life is arguably crucial to living a God-honoring life.

In addition, we can know that God chose Israel and that He has not forgotten His promise. We can and should rejoice that one day soon Israel will be a believing nation and will experience God's blessings forever.

We can know that we have been chosen for salvation from the Tribulation. If the Lord returns in our lifetimes as we suspect, then we will not only not experience the Tribulation wrath, we will not experience death either. The soon return of our Lord is our blessed hope, and it is tied with our election to the Rapture.

Knowing that God chooses us to serve Him should provide an additional motivation to get to work. He did not choose us to sit on the sidelines and watch the angels serve God forever. He chose us to serve Him now and forever.

There is only one city on earth that God chose. That should cause us to have a special love for Jerusalem. Indeed, Revelation 21 is very clear that on the new earth the lead city will be the New Jerusalem. Likely even Church-Age believers will have a dwelling there (as well as a dwelling in whatever nation they will live).

Finally and most importantly, we can and should rejoice because we know the Chosen One. The Lord Jesus is the One God chose. And the Lord Jesus fulfilled His ministry. He lived a sinless life and He died on the cross, taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). His triumphant cry, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), is directly related to the Biblical doctrine of election. He was chosen to go to the cross for us and He did. The finished work of Christ is the finished work of the Chosen One.

X. CONCLUSION

God elects both people and places for service. As far as I can tell, he does not elect anyone to everlasting life. Our eternal destiny is not a matter of God's choice, or even our choice. It is simply a matter of who ends up in the Book of Life (Rev 20:15). All who believe in Jesus for His promise of life are in the Book and have everlasting life. All who die never having believed in Jesus are not, and never will be, in the Book (assuming they lived beyond the age of accountability and with full mental faculties).

Just as the L in TULIP, Limited Atonement, is not true, neither is the U in TULIP, unconditional election, true. Calvinists say the five points hang together. And if they do, then the fact that the L is not true should give us a clue that the U is not true either.

Rejoice in your assurance of everlasting life based on God's promise, not based on some supposed doctrine of election to everlasting life that cannot be found in Scripture.