

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

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BACKGROUND

John Calvin was a French theologian who moved to Geneva, Switzerland in 1536, where he published his "Institutes of Christian Religion."

Calvin's belief system reflected earlier teachings by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), and later became known as Calvinism. Calvin's theology states that due to man's inherited sinful nature, he cannot come to God; rather, God must come to him. God has already determined (predestined) who He will save and who He will condemn, and therefore, His Son only died for the saved, otherwise known as the "elect." The members of the "elect" cannot resist being saved, and having been chosen by God, they cannot fall away.

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Calvin's concept of predestination and election is summarized in the acrostic **TULIP**:

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

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Our focus in this study is on the doctrine of Unconditional Election (the **U** in the TULIP acrostic), the belief that God has already elected (or predestined) whom He desires to be saved, and predestined those who will be condemned.

Let us examine several Bible verses commonly used by Calvinists to justify this belief.

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Supposed proof texts:

"For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" (Romans 9:15)

"Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?" (Romans 9:21)

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As we read Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we must consider the *context* of what Paul is discussing: the Jews and the choices God made concerning them in the past (Romans 9:1-13).

Paul's conclusion is that God has the right to decide to whom He will open the doors of salvation. (Romans 9:14-24).

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Paul is NOT saying here that God has already decided the identity of the saved and the lost.

Rather, Paul is declaring God's ability to save and to condemn, to show mercy and to harden, and how that ability was exercised in the Old Testament. He then declares that God has now opened the doors of salvation to all, Jew and Gentile alike.

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"What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." (Romans 9:22-24)

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"As He says also in Hosea, 'I will call those who were not My people, "My people," and her who was not beloved, "beloved." And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, "you are not My people," there they shall be called sons of the living God.'" (Romans 9:25-26)

God has declared that all men – not only Jews – may come to Him now for salvation. This is what Paul says in Romans 9:1-33, not that God has already determined exactly who will be saved.

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Supposed proof text:

"... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us ..." (Ephesians 1:4-8)

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Again, paying attention to *context*, note the identity of the collective pronouns, "us," "we," and "our."

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus ..." (Ephesians 1:1)

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All spiritual blessings are found In Christ, especially salvation. We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), based on a personal decision to obey, not predestination.

To better understand what Paul means in Ephesians 1:4-8, consider Romans 8:29-30:

"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." (Romans 8:29-30)

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As Paul writes to encourage the brethren in Rome and Ephesus, he establishes that God has predestined those who are in Christ to become conformed to the image of His Son.

What is predestined is not the identity of the saved, but the character of the saved. After choosing to submit our will to His in the waters of baptism, we make it our goal to be more like Christ each day of our lives by studying His word, abiding in His word, and spreading His word.

The rebellious choose disobedience, the godly choose obedience which leads to conformity to the image of His Son.

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God's foreknowledge does not impede man's free will, lest God be the author or the cause of any kind of sin.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:13-15)

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

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Supposed proof text:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

What God prepared beforehand were the good works that those in Christ would walk in, not the personal identity of those who walk in them. Being in Christ is determined by our choice, not a choice God made before creation.

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The Scriptures equip us to perform every good work.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

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Supposed proof text:

"... who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity ..." (2 Timothy 1:9)

Paul affirms to Timothy that God has saved us, not according to our works, but by His works, in that He sacrificed for us His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

We cannot earn salvation in the sense that by deeds alone we can be saved. We must have the grace of God, manifested in that sacrifice of His Son, in order to be saved.

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In order to receive the benefit of His sacrifice, it is abundantly evident that a response is necessary, and whatever response is given is necessarily a work.

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."
(Philippians 2:12-13)

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"And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation ..." (Hebrews 5:9)

"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power ..." (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9)

We cannot earn our salvation, but we must be obedient if we wish to go to Heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

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Unconditional Election cannot be justified from the Scriptures. If God has predestined the elect for salvation by His sovereign choice alone, it necessitates that God has predestined the rest for condemnation in the same way. This violates the Biblical precept of God's impartiality:

- *"Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality ..." (Acts 10:34)*
- *"For there is no partiality with God." (Romans 2:11)*
- *"... God shows no partiality ..." (Galatians 2:6)*
- *"... give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him." (Ephesians 6:9)*

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Consider what Paul told the saints in Rome:

"But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God."
(Romans 2:5-11)

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In the previous passage (Romans 2:5-11), Paul clearly defines the standard by which men shall be judged; it is not God's sovereign arbitrary choice, but on the basis of whether one was found obedient or disobedient to God.

It is clear, therefore, that the Holy Spirit revealed through Paul that God's judgment of man is not based on some predetermined master list of the saved and the lost, but upon the fidelity of each individual soul.

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Furthermore, if God has already determined who will be saved and who will be condemned, this would even negate the need for the last Judgment, defined clearly in the following passages:

"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37).

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds." (Matthew 16:27)

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"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

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"And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds."

(Revelation 20:12-13)

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The Judgment is spoken of as a real event, wherein every man will be judged on the basis of his deeds in this life and his relationship with Christ. Why would this event be written about in scripture if God had already determined its outcome?

God's omnipotence and sovereignty does not demand that God function in any given way. Instead, He reveals for our benefit part of His nature so that we can serve Him. That nature is not the unfair tyrannical God presented in Calvinist theology.

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God calls all men and women through the Gospel, and it is up to each soul to choose to serve Him or not, and to reap the rewards or consequences.

"It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
(2 Thessalonians 2:14)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

(See also Romans 6:17-23; 10:14-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 2:4)

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It can be determined with certainty that the doctrine of unconditional election of each saint is not established in the scriptures, for God now allows all men to come to Him.

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

HOW TO OBEY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Hear the word (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15; James 1:21)

Believe the gospel (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24)

Repent of sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31)

Confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:10; Matthew 10:32-33)

Be Baptized (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)

Remain Obedient (Matthew 7:21; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:12)