Unconditional Election

Unconditional election is the second of the five points of Calvinism. The five points are described using the acrostic TULIP: T- Total inability/depravity; U- Unconditional election; L- Limited atonement/particular redemption; I- Irresistible grace/efficacious call of the Spirit; and P- Perseverance of the saints. Below is a definition of unconditional election and, beside it, a description of the Arminian counterpoint known as conditional election:*

Calvinism

Unconditional Election

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response of obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. Thus God's choice of the sinner, not the sinner's choice of Christ, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

Arminianism

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.

Key similarities:

- God chose the elect before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).
- The elect, of their free will, repent and believe in Christ (Mark 1:15; John 1:12, 6:69, 9:35-38, 20:31; Act 13:39, 16:31; Rom. 3:22, 4:5, 10:9-10; Gal. 2:16, 3:22; Eph. 2:8-9).
- The non-elect die in their sins (John 8:21-24) and stand in judgment before God without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

From *The Five Points of CALVINISM - Defined, Defended, Documented* by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas.

(Over)

Key differences:

- Calvinism teaches that God's choice of certain people to salvation before the foundation of the world was based solely on His sovereign will (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11). Arminianism teaches that God's choice of the elect was based on His foreseeing that they would respond to His call (Rom. 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2).
- Calvinism teaches that God gives the elect the gifts of faith and repentance; these are the result, not the cause, of God's choice (2 Tim. 2:25). Arminianism teaches that faith and repentance are products of the human will.
- Calvinism teaches that God's choice of the sinner is the ultimate cause of salvation. Arminianism teaches that the sinner's choice of Christ is the ultimate cause of salvation.

What is election?

The Baptist Faith & Message states: "Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility."

The word "election" in Scripture is derived from the Greek word *eklegomai*, which means "to choose something for oneself." This corresponds to the Hebrew word *bachar*. Election is "God's plan to bring salvation to His people and His world…. election encompasses the entire range of divine activity from creation, God's decision to bring the world into being out of nothing, to the end time, the making anew of heaven and earth" (*Holman Bible Dictionary*). The Bible also uses words such as "choose," "predestinate," "foreordain," "determine," and "call" to indicate that God has entered into a special relationship with certain individuals and groups through whom He has decided to fulfill His purpose.

The Bible speaks of election in three ways: 1) the election of individuals to office or to honor and privilege, for example, Abraham, Jacob, Saul, David, and the apostles; 2) the election of nations to special privileges, particularly the Jews (Deut. 7:6; Rom. 9:4-5); and 3) the election of individuals to eternal life (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2). It is the third usage of election with which we are concerned. The Bible teaches that people are elected "for salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13), to receive the "adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5); and "to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph. 1:4). The ultimate end of election is the "praise of His glorious grace" (Eph. 1:6).

But is God's election of sinners conditioned on foreseen faith and repentance, or is His divine election the *cause* of faith and repentance in the hearts of those He chose out of His good pleasure and sovereign will? We will explore this question in a future session.

Next Week: T-U-L-I-P – Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption