What Does the Bible Say About Divine Election and Human Free Will?

Introduction

1. Our question for this morning came from Nate and it relates to the nature and purpose of election and its relationship to our free will (apparently, Nate likes the simple topics)
2. When most of us hear the terms "**elect**" or "**election**" in the context of the Bible, we probably think about salvation because believers are referred to as "**elect**" in the NT:
   a. In Matthew 24:31 Jesus said a time will come when His angels "**will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other**"
   b. In Romans 8:33, Paul referred to us believers as "**God's elect**"

3. However, the concept of election isn't restricted to the New Testament; it's a doctrine that runs throughout the Bible
4. So, today we are going to broaden our perspective and look at election from a whole-Bible point of view:
   a. First, we'll look at the nature of election
   b. Next, we'll look at the purpose of election
   c. Finally, we'll look at how human free will relates to election

A. The nature of election

1. The first thing we have to do is define election:
   a. There are mainly two Hebrew and Greek words that are used in the Bible:
      1) The Hebrew word used most often in the OT is *bechar* which means to choose or be chosen
      2) The Greek term most often used in the NT is eklego which also refers to choosing or being chosen; it's usually translated as "**chosen**" or "**elect**"

   b. So, election refers to the principle (or doctrine) that God chooses or sets apart individuals or people for His divine and sovereign purposes

2. In one sense, this applies God to choosing specific individuals for Earthly tasks or purposes:
   a. While the specific words we just discussed aren't always used in these examples, the principle still applies
   b. Old Testament Examples:
      1) God chose Noah to deliver mankind and animals during the Flood
      2) He chose Abraham and his descendants, including the nation of Israel (READ Genesis 18:19 & Deuteronomy 4:37)

3) He chose Moses, Aaron and Joshau to deliver Israel from Egypt and take them to the promise land
4) He chose judges like judges like Deborah, Gideon, and Sampson to deliver Israel from their enemies
5) He chose David, Solomon, and others to serve as kings over Israel
6) And, He chose the major and minor prophets to call out Israel over their sin and encourage them during their captivity

c. New Testament Examples:
1) God chose Mary and Joseph to be the Earthly parents of Jesus, even calling Mary "**favored one**" (Luke 1:28)
2) Jesus chose His Apostles, and even refers to them as "**the ones I have chosen**" (John 13:18)
3) Jesus chose Paul and referred to him as "**a chosen instrument of mine**" (Acts 9:15)
4) God the Father even referred to Jesus as "**His chosen One**" (Luke 9:35)

d. What all these examples have in common is that God specifically chose them for specific tasks or purposes

3. However, there's a more significant and important aspect to God's election and it has to do with salvation:
a. When God chose Abraham, it was just about blessing Abraham and his descendants, but His redemptive plan to bless all nations (READ Genesis 12:1-4)
b. When He chose Israel, it wasn't just about building a holy nation, but bringing salvation to the ends of the earth (READ Isaiah 49:6)
c. When God chose Jesus, it was to serve His redemptive purpose (READ Matthew 12:18)
d. And, nearly every time the words chose, chosen, and elect are used of believers in the New Testament it refers to God having chosen us for salvation

B. The purpose of election

1. In a broad, overarching sense, election serves to demonstrate God's sovereignty in carrying out and fulfilling His purposes:
a. We saw this with all the individuals mentioned above
b. We also see it in His choosing of Israel:
1) Deuteronomy 7:6: "**For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth**."
2) Isaiah 44:1-2: "**But now listen, O Jacob, My servant, And Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus says the Lord who made you And formed you from the womb, who will help you, 'Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen.'**"

2. However, I would like to focus on His purposes in electing individuals in regard to salvation:
    a. In Ephesians 1 Paul wrote, "**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world…**" followed by at least 10 reason WHY God chose us:
        1) To make us holy and blameless (4)
        2) To adopt us as His sons (5)
        3) To praise His glory (6)
        4) To redeem us (7a)
        5) To forgive us (7b)
        6) To lavish grace upon us (7c-8a)
        7) To make known to us the mystery of His will (8b-10)
        8) To give us an inheritance (11)
        9) To be praised for His glory (12)
        10) To be sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit (13)

    b. These are some of the reasons why God chose us for salvation, but He did it as an act of His sovereign will to eliminate any chance that we could boast in ourselves:
        1) Ephesians 2:8-9 (READ)
        2) 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (READ)
        3) By choosing us as a matter of His own sovereign will and making salvation available by grace through faith, no one can boast
        4) Rather, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" because all praise and glory for our salvation belongs to Him

C. How human free will relates to election

1. So, if God choses (elects) who He saves, then what about our free will?
2. Bible scholars since the first century have debated the tension between God's sovereign election of individuals for salvation and human free will
3. Today, the debate mostly revolves around two theological frameworks:

    **NOTE: this will be an EXTREMELY simplified, limited description of each because there are as many flavors of both as there are ice cream flavors at Baskin Robbins

    a. On the one hand, we have Calvinism which emphasizes God's sovereignty in electing or choosing individuals for salvation:
        1) It's named after John Calvin, a theologian who lived in the 16th century during the Reformation, but Calvinism as a theological system didn't develop until after his death
        2) Generally speaking, Calvinism holds that because God is completely sovereign, salvation is entirely a work of His and His alone; it holds that because humanity is completely and totally corrupted by sin, no one can

choose God without Him first unconditionally electing (choosing) them AND regenerating them (e.g. regeneration comes before faith)

3) Calvinism is often referred to by another name, Monergism, which is a Latin term which means to "work alone" (referring to God working alone in salvation)
4) Calvinism is often summarized as having five points represented by the acronym TULIP:
    a) **T: Total Depravity**: sin has so corrupted human nature that man cannot choose God on their own
    b) **U: Unconditional Election**: God chooses who to save entirely on His own regardless of a person's merit, or even foreknowledge of them having faith
    c) **L: Limited Atonement**: Jesus died only for the sins of the elect, not everyone
    d) **I: Irresistible Grace**: those God elects cannot resist His call to salvation
    e) **P: Perseverance of the Saints**: once chosen, the elect cannot lose or even give up their salvation

5) Not every Calvinist ascribes to all five points—some 5, some 3, some even refer to themselves as something like 2 ½ point Calvinists
6) Verses in Support of Calvinism:
    a) Ephesians 1:4: "**He chose us in Him before the foundation of the wo**rld…"
    b) Romans 3:10: "**There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understand, there is none who seeks for God"**
    c) Romans 9:15: "**For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.**
    d) 1 Corinthians 2:14: "**The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God…and he is unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**"

7) The problem with Calvinism is that it seems to over emphasize God's sovereignty in salvation and diminish human free will

b. On the other hand, we have Arminianism which emphasizes human free will and the ability to choose to accept or reject salvation:
    1) Arminianism is named after another 16th century Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius, who was born about three years before Calvin died
    2) Generally speaking, Arminianism holds that God desires all people to be saved and bestows a form of grace on all people called Prevenient Grace (grace that "goes before"); even though every man is corrupted by sin and fallen, this grace enables anyone to accept or reject the Gospel and Jesus Christ

3) Arminianism is also referred to sometimes as Synergism which comes from the Latin word meaning "to work together" (man working with God for salvation)
4) It's often summarized by five points as well, but they don't have a cool acronym like Calvinists <grin>:
    a) **Conditional Election**: God choses individuals for salvation based on His foreknowledge of who will have faith
    b) **Unlimited (Universal) Atonement**: Jesus died for everyone, not just the elect, but it's only effective for those who have faith
    c) **Prevenient (Assisting) Grace**: God's grace goes out to everyone to enable them to have faith and freely accept or reject the Gospel
    d) **Resistible Grace**: the Holy Spirit's call to salvation can be resisted by human choice
    e) **Conditional Preservation**: believers maintain their salvation through faith but can lose it or freely turn away from God and give up their salvation

5) Verses in support or Arminianism:
    a) Matthew 11:28: "**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.**"
    b) Romans 10:13: "**Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.**"
    c) Titus 2:11: "**For the grace of God has appeared, brining salvation for all people.**"

6) The problem with Arminianism is that it seems to overemphasize human free will and diminish God's sovereignty

5. So, this presents what Charles Spurgeon referred to as a Biblical antimony:
    a. An antinomy refers to two different rules, laws, or principles that are true independently or on their own but that also appear to contradict one another
        1) The Bible teaches that God choses to save some
        2) The Bible also teaches that individuals can chose to accept or reject the Gospel, and that they are responsible for their choice
        3) Both of these are true, but they seem to contradict one another—thus, we have an antinomy

    b. So, how do we resolve this?
        1) We don't; that's the nature of antinomies
        2) Rather, we accept both recognizing that the Bible teaches both and as God said through the Prophet Isaiah 55:8-9: "**For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.**"

Illustration of the doorway with “Come all who are weary” on one side and “Chosen before the foundation of the world” on the other

D. Takeaways

1. Anyone can be saved, but they must accept the salvation God offers by grace through faith in Jesus:
   a. When God created Adam and Eve it’s clear He gave them a free will; they were not robots who could only obey, and this is clear in their choice to sin
   b. We can argue like Calvinists and Arminians over the exact nature of free will since it’s been tainted by sin, and exactly how God’s sovereignty, election, and human free will co-exist
   c. But, we cannot escape the fact that each individual is held accountable for the decision he or she makes in regard to Christ because each has the opportunity to chose or reject Him
   d. 1 Timothy 2:4 says God “**desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**”
   e. But, they must choose to come (Revelation 22:17): “**The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come, and let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost**.”

2. While this is true, the fact that we have been chosen by God ensures that our salvation is secure in Him:
   a. Ephesians 1:13-14 says that when God chose us, He also sealed us with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation
   b. In Romans 8:38-39 Paul wrote that nothing—ABSOLUTELY NOTHING—can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus
   c. Jesus Himself promised that as His sheep, we will never perish and no one will snatch us out of His hand because God is sovereign (READ John 10:27-29)