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Divine Election and the Universal Offer of the Gospel

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1. Introduction

This is one of the most important topics that must be taken into contemplation time and again because there are many people who are totally perplexed and perturbed when they think of divine election and the universal offer of the Gospel. This doctrine of divine election needs to be clearly explained to the people as it is viewed from

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² See www.CEU.hu and his page <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/3-index.html>.

different theological perspectives. There are those who deny the election of God, and see God as God of discrimination by electing others to eternal life while others are not elected. The other group is comprised of those who agree that God is not God of discrimination; He chooses whom He chooses according to His will. Here we are going to focus on the divine election as the first point in this paper. Different views of the three Reformed theologians, John Calvin, St. Augustine and Karl Barth, will be illustrated. The *praescientia*, election in Christ and several characteristics of divine election from the Reformed perspective will also be dealt with under the doctrine of divine election. The second point to be discussed is the divine election and the preaching of the Gospel. The last point to be discussed in this paper is the universal sin and the universal offer of the Gospel.

2.1. Different views of the Reformed theologians

The doctrine of divine election is viewed from different perspectives. There are many theologians who wrote and argued about this doctrine. All the arguments about this doctrine argued by different people were based on the way those people understand this doctrine from their theological point of view. Here I will give the views of the three Reformed theologians, John Calvin, St. Augustine, and Karl Barth, about the doctrine of divine election.

2.1.1. John Calvin

Divine election, according to Calvinism, is God's choice of certain persons for His special favor. It may refer to the choice of Israel as God's special covenant people (Erickson, 1987:916) or to the choice of individuals to some special office (Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:15; Hos. 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:10) (Berkhof, 1988:114). The sense which primarily concerns us here however is the choice of certain persons to be God's spiritual children and thus recipients of eternal life.³ One Biblical evidence that God has selected certain individuals for salvation is found in Ephesians 1: 4-5: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."⁴

³ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Perfectionism," in *Biblical Doctrine*, p 65

⁴ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1960:85.

In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—”. Jesus indicated that the initiative had been His in the selection of His disciples to eternal life: “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name” (John 15:16) (Boettner, 1960:87). The ability to come to Jesus depends upon the initiative of the Father: “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day” (John 6:44, 65). Conversely, all who are given to Jesus by the Father will come to Him: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). Furthermore, in Acts 13:48 we read that “When the Gentiles heard this [the offer of salvation], they were glad and gloried the Word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”.⁵ Salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God. The Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the Gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gift of salvation.⁶ John Calvin rightly says, “we shall never be clearly convinced as we ought to be that our salvation flows from the fountain of God’s free mercy, till we are acquainted with this eternal election, which illustrates the grace of God by this comparison, that He adopts not all promiscuously to the hope of salvation but gives to some what He refuses to others. Ignorance of this principle evidently detracts from the divine glory, and diminishes real humility”.⁷ Calvin admits that this doctrine arouses very perplexing questions in the minds of some, for, says he, “they consider nothing more unreasonable than that of the common mass of mankind, some should be predestinated to salvation; and others to destruction” (Boettner, 1960:85).

The vital question that one can ask is, “What are the conditions of being elected by God?” This question can be clearly answered by the

⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:916

⁶ <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html>

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter XXI, sec.1.

doctrine of unconditional election which is one of the *five points of Calvinism*⁸. The doctrine of unconditional election asserts that God's choice from eternity of those whom He will bring to Himself is not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people. Rather, it is unconditionally grounded in God's mercy alone.⁹ The doctrine of unconditional election is sometimes made to stand for all Reformed doctrine, sometimes even by its adherents, as the chief article of Reformed Christianity. However, according to the doctrinal statements of these churches, it is not a balanced view to single out this doctrine to stand on its own as representative of all that is taught. Unconditional election and its corollary in the doctrine of divine election are never properly taught, according to Calvinists, except as an assurance to those who seek forgiveness and salvation through Christ that their faith is not in vain, because God is able to bring to completion all whom He intends to save. Nevertheless, non-Calvinists object that these doctrines discourage the world from seeking salvation. It is the doctrine which states that God chose those whom He was pleased to bring to knowledge of Himself, not based upon any merit shown by the object of His grace and not based upon His looking forward to discover who would "accept" the offer of the gospel. God has elected, based solely upon the counsel of His own will, some for glory and others for damnation (Rom. 9:15, 21). He has done this act before the foundations of the world (Eph. 1:4-8). Calvinism on the concept of the sovereignty of God agrees that God is the Creator and Lord of all things, and consequently He is free to do whatever He wills.¹⁰ He is not subject to or answerable to anyone. Man is in no position to judge God for what He does. One of the passages frequently cited in this connection is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The master hired some workers early in the morning, some at the eleventh hour. Those who were hired at the eleventh hour were paid the same amount promised to those hired at the beginning of the day. When those hired earlier complained about

⁸ What is designated Calvinism has taken many different forms over the years. There are certain common features found in all of them. A mnemonic aid sometimes used to summarize the complete system is the acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Cf. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1960:60.

⁹ Romans 9:10-16. <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Rom&c=9&v=1&t=ESV#top>

¹⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Perfectionism," in *Biblical Doctrine*, p 62-64.

this seeming injustice, the master replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?” (Matt. 20:13-15).¹¹ Another significance passage is Paul’s metaphor of the potter and the clay (Boettner, 1960:93). To the individual who complains that God is unjust, Paul responds: “But, who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder; ‘Why have you made me thus?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (Rom. 9:20-21) (Boers, 1994:135; Louw, 1979:100). This concept of divine sovereignty, together with human inability, is basic to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. This doctrine does not rule out, however, man’s responsibility to believe in the redeeming work of God the Son (John 3:16-18). Scripture presents a tension between God’s sovereignty in salvation, and man’s responsibility to believe which it does not try to resolve. Both are true -- to deny man’s responsibility is to affirm an unbiblical hyper-Calvinism; to deny God’s sovereignty is to affirm an unbiblical Arminianism. The elect are saved unto good works (Eph. 2:10). Thus, though good works will never bridge the gulf between man and God that was formed in the Fall, good works are a result of God’s saving grace. This is what Peter means when he admonishes the Christian reader to make his “calling” and “election” sure (2 Pet. 1:10). Bearing the fruit of good works is an indication that God has sown seeds of grace in fertile soil.¹²

The doctrine that men are saved only through the unmerited love and grace of God finds its full and honest expression only in the doctrines of Calvinism (Boettner, 1960:95). The interpretation that God’s choice or selection of certain individuals for salvation is absolute or unconditional is in keeping with God’s actions in other contexts, such as His choice of the nation of Israel, which followed through on the selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau. In Romans 9 Paul argues impressively that all of these choices are totally of God and in no way depend on the people chosen. Having quoted God’s

¹¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:916

¹² <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html>

statement to Moses in Exodus 33:19 (cf Rom. 9:15), “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”, Paul comments, “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16).¹³

For the most part, Calvinists insist that divine election is not inconsistent with free will, that is, as they understand the term. They deny, however; that humans have free will in the Arminian sense. What Calvinists emphasize is that sin has removed, if not freedom, at least the ability to exercise freedom properly. Loraine Boettner, for example, compares fallen humanity to a bird with a broken wing. The bird is “free” to fly, but is unable to do so. Likewise, “the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors”.¹⁴ It is only when God comes in His special grace to those whom He has chosen that they are able to respond. Then, seeing clearly and vividly the nature of their sins and the greatness, glory, and love of God, they will most assuredly and infallibly turn to God (Erickson, 1987:917).

2.1.2. St. Augustine

The Divine foreordaining or foreknowledge of all that will happen; with regard to the salvation of some and not others. It has been particularly associated with the teachings of [St. Augustine of Hippo](#) and of [John Calvin](#).¹⁵ God predestined to His Kingdom those whom He foresaw would be worthy of election and would depart from this life by a good death. More particularly, predestination is equated with God’s foreknowledge of a person’s faith, as Augustine himself said in his early *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos*.¹⁶ Augustine notes that God calls people in two different ways. Some, such as the guests in the parable who refused to come to the wedding, are called although God foreknows they will reject the call. The predestined, however, are called by a call which

¹³ Benjamin B. Warfield, “Perfectionism,” in *Biblical Doctrine*, p. 53

¹⁴ Boettner, *Predestination*, p.62

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination#Biblical_support_of_Predestination

¹⁶ The Fathers of The Church. *Saint Augustine*. Four Anti-Pelagian writings. Carlfornia: The Catholic University of America Press. 1992: 194

makes them into believers.¹⁷ But Ambrose, Origen, and Jerome held that God distributed His grace among men according as He foresaw that each would use it well.¹⁸ In an early exegesis of Romans 9, where Paul discusses God's favoring of Jacob over Esau, Augustine had assumed that election must be based on foreknowledge of faith; God could see that Jacob, and not Esau, would one day put his strength in the Lord.¹⁹ It was not the error of Pelagius. Augustine never thought of himself as having ever been a Pelagian. But it was close enough, an error in the spirit of Pelagius; now the monks were caught by it. In both work for their benefit, he commended his brethren to consult another work of his on Paul, written at the request of his friend and mentor, Simplician, successor to Ambrose in the See of Milan.²⁰ In the second part of his first book of responses to Simplician, Augustine revises his earlier reading of Romans 9 and concludes, somewhat to his own amazement, that Paul could not have been speaking there of an election based on foreknown faith; that would be too close to the idea that divine favor is dispensed on the basis of what some human beings do better than others.²¹ In the case at hand, Jacob would be better than his brother at faithfulness. Augustine had before been convinced that Paul rejects works-based election; what had yet to occur to him was how broadly the notion of a work should be interpreted. In his revised reading of Paul, he decides that election and the means of conveying it – God's grace – must be utterly gratuitous. Augustine's meditation on the text of Romans 9 in *Ad Simplicianum* brought him to the recognition that God chooses some of Adam's offspring for faith and participation in the grace of Christ while allowing others to fall into sin and merit eternal condemnation.²² If God favors Jacob over Esau, one of two brothers formed in the same womb, then God has decided, for reasons

¹⁷ Ibid., p 195

¹⁸ The perseverance of the elect rests upon the sovereign power of God [*Dei potentiam quae maior omnibus est*] exercised by Christ on their behalf.

¹⁹ *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 3.7; *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex epistola ad Romanos* 60-62.

²⁰ *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 4.8; *De dono perseverantiae* 21:55.

²¹ *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 1.2.5-7.

²² J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes) 1980:175-176

known only to God, to make Jacob into the brother worth choosing.²³ In other words, God both foreknows and predestines Jacob's redemption. For anyone who is similarly favored by God, the call to redemption is given in such a way as to elicit a faithful response; God never has to wait for human faith to come of its own. As for the ones not favored – the condemned heap (*massa damnata*) – they, like Esau, are simply never called in the right way.²⁴

Augustine addresses his opponents' contention that predestination is a dangerous innovation, by arguing that it has always been taught in the Church, although not necessarily by name. When Paul speaks of "foreknowledge" in Romans 11:2, for instance, it is clear that he is speaking of predestination, God's foreknowledge of what He was going to do.²⁵ When Cyprian proclaimed that nothing is our own, and Ambrose said that our hearts and thoughts are not within our power, they were preaching the gratuity of grace and thus implicitly they were preaching predestination. Clearly, in their cases the doctrine of predestination did not hamper their commitment to exhortation. Augustine cites further texts to show that Cyprian and Ambrose taught gratuitous grace of faith and perseverance and adds a misquoted passage from Gregory of Nazianzus, which he understands to the same effect.²⁶ As repeatedly in the treatises Augustine responds sharply to his opponents' use of his own earlier writings, in this case to the claim that he defended the faith quite well in them without the doctrine of predestination. He cites his teaching on the gratuity of grace from *Ad Simplicianum* on, especially in the *Confessions*, and the doctrine of predestination there implicit. The teaching of *De correptione et gratia*, that perseverance to the end is a distinct gift of God, is set out more clearly than before, but is nothing new. It follows from Augustine's earlier teaching, as well as that of Cyprian.²⁷ Augustine argues on the basis of John 6 that no one comes to Jesus in faith "unless the Father draw him" by grace, given through

²³ Wetzel, J., Predestination, Pelagianism, and foreknowledge, in (Stump, E and Kretzmann, N) 2001:53

²⁴ *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 1.2.13-14.

²⁵ The Fathers of The Church, *Saint Augustine*. Four Anti-Pelagian writings. (California: The Catholic University of America Press) 1992:198

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

the Spirit.²⁸ Furthermore, in Acts 13:48 we read that, “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed”. Augustine's idea of divine election rests on the assertion that God has foreordained, from eternity, those who will be saved. The number of the elect is fixed.²⁹ God has chosen the elect certainly and gratuitously, without any previous merit (*ante merita*) on their part. Augustine says that “The elect of God are chosen by Him to be His Children, in order that they might be made to believe, not because He foresaw that they would believe” (Boettner, 1960:101). Christians who follow teachers such as [St. Augustine](#) and [John Calvin](#) generally accept that God does decide the eternal destinations of each person, so that their future actions or beliefs follow according to God's choice. A contrasting Christian view maintains that God is completely sovereign over all things but that He chose to give each individual free will, which each person can exercise to accept or reject God's offer of salvation and hence God's actions and determinations follow according to man's choice.³⁰ According to Augustine predestination is the act of God from beginning to end. It is His act in His will and not based on foreknowledge of later merit in the elect.³¹ The perseverance of the elect in Christ to the end of their life comes not by their power but as a gift from God.³² The influence of Augustine also then showed in translations of the Bible from that time on; variations which are not in themselves visible in the syntax or grammar of the New Testament Greek text. Perhaps the best example of this in the [Vulgate](#) is the addition of '*prae*' to '*ordinati*' in Acts 13:48 which is there only to give the idea this was God who did this. Later translations show this influence of the doctrine by the additions of the

²⁸ Ibid., p.194

²⁹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: Volume 2 (From Augustine to the eve of the Reformation)*. (Abingdon Press) 1970-1975.

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination#Biblical_support_of_Predestination

³¹ J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes) 1980:179

³² Douglas, J. D., Comfort, Philip W. & Mitchell, Donald, Editors, *Who's Who in Christian History*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1992.

word 'his' in Romans 8:28 and 11:22 all suggesting an interpretation consistent with unconditional election.³³

2.1.3. Karl Barth

Louis Berkhof says, “In our day Barth has again directed attention to the doctrine of predestination, but has given a construction of it which is not even distantly related to that of Augustine and Calvin. With the Reformers he holds that this doctrine stresses the sovereign freedom of God in His election, revelation, calling and so on” (1988:111). At the same time he does not see in predestination separation of men, and does not understand election like Calvin as particular election. Karl Barth’s doctrine of election begins with a critique of the traditional Calvinist position that God in eternity determined in final and absolute fashion who is to be saved and who is to be lost. He regards this position as a misleading of the Bible, a misleading based upon a metaphysical belief that God’s relationship to the universe is static – certain individuals have from all eternity been chosen and others rejected, and this cannot be altered.³⁴ Barth admits that the older theologians went to the Bible, especially Romans 9 and Ephesians 1. They did not read the Bible in the right way, however, nor did they choose the right starting point. What must be done is to read the Bible Christologically, making Jesus Christ the starting point for the doctrine.³⁵ If we would like to formulate the doctrine of divine election, says Karl Barth, we must do so in the light of God’s work of revelation and atonement (Barth, 1957:174). Here we encounter the fact that Jesus Christ came to save men. Barth maintains that there is an intricate connection between the fact that Christ is at the center of God’s work within time and the eternal foreordaining of that work in the divine election.³⁶ If this is the case, God’s will was to elect, not reject men. The incarnation is proof that God is for men, not against them. He has chosen them, not rejected them (Erickson, 1987:922). When Karl Barth comes to ask who has been chosen by God, this Christological basis continues. In place of the static, fixed, and absolute decree found in John Calvin’s

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predestination#Biblical_support_of_Predestination

³⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:922

³⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol.2, part 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark) 1957:145-148

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.149

thought, Karl Barth substitutes the person of Christ. This is the essential modification which he makes in the traditional view of predestination (Barth, 1957:161). The major point in his conception of predestination is that the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ. We are not to look for some will of God beyond or behind the work that He has done within history through Christ. As Karl Barth sees it, the traditional view regarded God's will as an unchangeable decree formed from eternity; He was bound to carry out this will within time. Barth posits a more dynamic view: God, like a king, is free to correct, suspend, or replace His decree.³⁷ Barth speaks of a "holy mutability" of God; He is not a prisoner of His own decree in such a fashion as to lead to virtual deism. The unchanging element is not, in Barth's view, an eternal choice of some and rejection of others. It is the constancy of God in His triune being as freely chosen love (Erickson, 1987:922-923). The choice of Jesus Christ is not as an isolated individual, however. For in Him the entire human race has been chosen (Barth, 1957:229). But even this is not the whole doctrine of election, for Christ is not merely the elected man; He is also the electing God. He freely obeyed the Father by electing to become man. Barth speaks of Christ as "concrete and manifest form of the divine decision – the decision of the Father; Son and Holy Spirit – in favor of the covenant to be established between Him and us" (Barth, 1957:105). Whenever Barth speaks of double predestination, he means that Jesus is both the electing God and the elected man. There is also a duality of content which approximates the traditional understanding of double predestination. For in choosing to become man Christ chose "reprobation, perdition, and death".³⁸ He voluntarily experienced rejection by humanity; this is most vividly seen in the cross. He chose reprobation for Himself in choosing election and life for mankind.³⁹

When Barth does turn to consider election of the individual as the third step in his discussion, he does not speak of double predestination. Rather; he speaks of a universal election. All human beings have been elected in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Barth

³⁷ Ibid., p.181

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol.2, part 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark) 1957:1

³⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:923

holds to universal salvation, a subject he deals with very cautiously without ever really committing himself (Erickson, 1987:923). Although all are elect, not all live as elect. Some live as if they were rejected. This is of one's own choosing and doing, however: "The task of the elected community is to proclaim to such a person that 'he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and is therefore not rejected, but elected by God in Jesus Christ; that the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ; and that he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision'" (Barth, 1957:306). There is no absolute difference between the elect and the rejected, the believers and the unbelievers, according to Karl Barth, for all have been elected. The former have realized the fact of their election and are living in the light of it; the latter are still living as if they were not elected.⁴⁰ Christians from a traditional background might wish to pry open the question of whether the rejected ones who are actually elect are also saved, but Karl Barth will not open that tangled issue. For him the church should not take too seriously the unbelief of the rejected ones. In the ultimate sense, there is no rejection of man by God. God has in Christ chosen rejection to Himself, but election on man.⁴¹

2.2. The *Praescientia*

John Calvin rejected the *praescientia* as an explanatory device. He did not deny God's knowing beforehand (Calvin, *Inst.*, III, xxi, 5), for God sees in fact all things as present before Him and His knowledge is extended over all of history and over all of creation. But the question is whether predestination may and can be made dependent on this as its cause and basis. John Calvin found this relationship of dependence present in Ambrosius, Origen, Jerome, and "almost all church fathers" (Calvin, *Inst.*, III, xxiii, 6). They taught that God distributed His grace among men depending on His "foreknowledge" of who would use it correctly (Calvin, *Inst.*, III, xxii, 8).

⁴⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol.2, part 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark) 1957:350

⁴¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:924

Augustine, too, supposedly taught the idea of prescience, but he rejected it after gaining more knowledge of scripture. Then he called it vain reasoning to defend God’s foreknowledge over against His grace and to say “that we were elected before the foundation of the world, because god foreknew that we would be good, not that He Himself would make us good”.⁴² The reason for Calvin’s opposition is clear – this *praescientia* implies justification by works. “For if you say, ‘Because He foresaw they would be holy, therefore He chose them’, you will invert the order of Paul. We may safely infer, then, ‘If He chose us that we should be holy, His foresight of our future holiness was not the cause of His choice’” (Calvin, *Inst.*, III xxii, 3). According to John Calvin, the idea of prescience does not solve any problem. He referred to Villa, who taught that life and death are more the outcome of God’s will than of His prescience. God sees beforehand, “but since He foresees the things which are to happen, simply because He has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by His sovereign appointment” (Calvin, *Inst.*, III xxiii, 6). John Calvin resists the idea of prescience just as he resists the interpretation of God’s providence as ‘bare permission’. He sees in it an attack against God’s greatness.⁴³ It supposes a waiting God whose judgment and final act depend on and follow upon man’s acceptance and decision, so that the final and principal decision falls with man; it teaches self-destination instead of divine destination (Calvin, *Inst.* 1, xviii, 1). According to Berkouwer (1960:36-37), it is the same defense with that of Kuyper and others, and which is summed up by Bavinck in words that convey that replacing predestination with the idea of prescience is emphatically contradicted by Scripture, religious experience, and theological thinking.

⁴² For St. Augustine, see *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, XIX, 38, where St. Augustine refers to John 15:16, “*Non vos me elegistis, sed ego vos elegi; nec fides ipsa praecedit. Non enim quia credimus, sed ut credamus elegit nos.*” See also X, 19. In spite of the clarity of St. Augustine’s word about *praedestinatio* and *praescientia* it has several times been attempted to interpret him in the direction of *praescientia* and *praevision*.

⁴³ G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1960:36.

2.3. Election in Christ

According to Berkouwer (1960:132) reflection on election and hiddenness can take no other direction when we believe that no hiddenness can make the revelation of God merely relative, for it is Christ who has made God known unto us (John 1:18), and it is therefore impossible to detach the election of God from the revelation of Christ. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin have indicated the grave danger of reflecting on election without thinking of Christ.⁴⁴ He who has recognized this danger and who understands that the revelation in Christ is not a “compensation” for the hiddenness of God, will therefore automatically come into contact with those words that again and again have been the cause of reflection on the election of God: election in Christ.

I think of Paul’s words in which he praises the riches of election: “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) (Boettner, 1980:85), a passage related to his other statement that in God was the good pleasure “which He purposed in Him (Christ)” (Eph. 1:9). Paul elsewhere speaks of the power of God “who saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal” (II Tim. 1:9).

Since election is in Christ, Paul can write that God has carried out His eternal plan in Christ, and that in Him “we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in Him” (Eph. 3:12). This call to boldness and confidence is not a last pastoral escape from the menace of a “hidden” election, but it is the way of the glad tidings. The boldness corresponds to the merciful election. This faith in Him makes no mistakes; it is in harmony with God’s choice. That is why faith cannot be frightened from a different direction (eternity) than the one from which the Gospel came to us. Nor do the sovereignty of God and His inscrutable majesty affect this boldness. Because we have this High Priest, we may with boldness draw near to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.132

2.4. Several characteristics of election from the Reformed perspective

According to Loraine Boettner (1960:96) the doctrine of eternal and unconditional election has sometimes been called the “heart” of the Reformed Faith. It emphasizes the sovereignty and grace of God in Salvation, while the Arminian view emphasizes the work of faith and obedience in the man who decides to accept the offered grace. In the Calvinistic system it is God alone who chooses those who are to be the heirs of heaven, those with whom He will share His riches glory; while in the Arminian system it is, in the ultimate analysis, man who determines this, - a principle somewhat lacking in humility to say the least. There are several characteristics of divine election as viewed by the Calvinists from the reformed perspective. Here I will spell out five points that we need to know as the most characteristics of election from the Reformed perspective.

Firstly, election is an expression of the sovereign will or good pleasure of God. It is not based on any merit in the one elected. Nor is it based upon foreseeing that the individual will believe. It is the cause, not the result, of faith (Boettner, 1960:96). By saying that the degree of election originates in the divine good pleasure the idea is excluded that it is determined by anything in man, such as foreseen faith or good works (Rom. 9:11; II Tim. 1:9) (Berkhof, 1988:114). *Secondly, election is efficacious.* Those whom God has chosen will most certainly come to faith in Him and, for that matter, will persevere in that faith to the end. All of the elect will certainly be saved. *Thirdly, election is from all eternity.* It is not a decision made at some point in time when the individual is already existent. It is what God has always purposed to do. *Fourthly, election is unconditional.* It does not depend upon man’s performing a specific action or meeting certain conditions or terms of God. It is not that God wills to save people if they do certain things. He simply wills to save them and brings it about. *Finally, election is immutable, and therefore renders the salvation of the elect certain.* God does not change His mind. Election is from all eternity and out of God’s infinite mercy; He has no reason or occasion to change His mind.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,) 1988: 114-115.

3. Divine election and the preaching of the Gospel

The question that one can ask after the discussion of the divine election is as follows: “If God predestines, can the Gospel really be meaningful?” Yes, the preaching of the Gospel is very important and fervently that are so clearly evident in Paul’s word: “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul uses here the word *anagke*, a very strong word which carries the idea of the absolutely necessary, the unavoidable.⁴⁶ For Paul this *anagke* is not a divine force, not a cosmological principle or an abstract necessity; it is a very peculiar “must” which characterizes the essence of his apostolate, and from which he cannot and does not want to withdraw. This “must” is the complete opposite of any arbitrary, private whim. It is full of the earnestness “from which he, if he does not want to incur the woe of damnation, cannot withdraw himself”. It is not a painful burden but an order which he fulfills with gladness because he understands the meaning of his commission from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. We see this meaningfulness, this purposeful order, everywhere in the New Testament. There is not the slightest possibility that – because of the election of God – it “actually” would be superfluous. And the apostolic practice clearly indicates that the significance of the preaching of the Gospel is beyond any doubt. The issue is the necessity of testifying of the crucified and resurrected Lord, and this necessity can be described in the words of Peter: “We cannot keep quiet. We must speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is not merely a fact from the past, but a message to be preached now, and always, to all nations. Paul travelled around the world and even wanted to go as far as Spain (Rom. 15:24, 28). In Acts 1:8 Christ commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the world. Apostle Paul in Romans 9 to 11 spoke of the calling of the church to proclaim the Word of God so that the not-yet Christians may believe in Christ. “How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14). “And how shall they preach,

⁴⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* Volume 2 (New York: United Bible Societies) 1989:13.

except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:15). And it is understood that Paul’s word about *anagke* does not prevent his citing the Old Testament word: “How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings” (Rom. 10:15).

One of the Reformed Confessions, the Canons of Dordt, encourages the preaching of the Gospel to all people. In pointing to what the Canons say regarding the promise of the Gospel: “Whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise ... ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends His Gospel” (Canons of Dordt, II, 5). Furthermore, the call given by the Gospel is mentioned (*ibid*, II, 6), and it is said that “As many as are called by the Gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called should come unto Him” (*ibid*, III, and IV, 8), while also Christ is said to be “offered by the Gospel” (*ibid*, III, and IV, 9). Central to the emphasis of the Canons of Dordt is its discussion of the seriousness of the preaching of the Gospel to all people. Why must the Gospel be preached to all? “For the simple reason that nobody knows who are the elect, head for head, soul for soul”.⁴⁷ And herein, and in the purpose of hardening the rejected, lies the significance of the preaching to all. And that, says Hoeksema, is the framework in which the Canons are constructed when they say that God shows seriously and truthfully in His Word that pleases Him, namely, that those who are called come to Him (Canons of Dordt, III-IV, 8).

4. Universal sin and the universal offer of the Gospel

4.1. Universal sin

Calvinists think of the whole human race as lost in sin. They emphasize the concept of total depravity: every individual is so sinful as to be unable to respond to any offer of grace. This condition, which we fully deserve, involves both moral corruption (and hence moral disability) and liability to punishment (guilt).⁴⁸ According to Charles Hodge, the sin of Adam injured not himself only but also all

⁴⁷ H. Hoeksema, *Een Kracht Gods*, p. 209.

⁴⁸ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987:915

descending from him by ordinary generation, is part of the faith of the whole Christian world.⁴⁹ (1979:192). The entire human race has sinned and is now sinful. In its head, Adam, the entire human race violated God's will and fell from the state of innocence in which God had created mankind. Consequently, all of us began life with a natural tendency to sin. The Bible tells us that with the fall, man's first sin, a radical change took place in the universe. Death came upon mankind (Gen. 2:17; 3:2-3, 9). God pronounced a curse upon mankind (Gen. 3:16-18).⁵⁰ In virtue of this original corruption men are "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil"⁵¹

The key passage for constructing a Biblical and contemporary model of original sin is Romans 5:12-19. Paul is arguing that death is the consequence of sin. The twelfth verse is particularly determinative: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned -". According to Erickson, in this verse, Paul certainly is saying that death originated in the human race because of Adam's sin. He is also saying that death is universal and the cause of this is the universal sin of mankind.⁵² Augustine understood "because" in verse 12 as meaning "in whom", since the Latin mistranslated the Greek at this point. Accordingly, his understanding of the last clause in verse 12 was that we were actually "in Adam", and therefore Adam's sin was ours as well.⁵³ Augustine emphasized the seriousness of Adam's sin and pinned the blame solely on Adam's own act of will. But that sin was not Adam's. All of us were one with him and thus participated in his sin. Since the human soul is derived from one's parents through the generative process, we were present in Adam and

⁴⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Volume Two Part II Anthropology Part III Soteriology (Chapters 1 - 14). (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1979:192.

⁵⁰ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1960:83.

⁵¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Volume Two Part II Anthropology Part III Soteriology (Chapters 1 -14). (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1979:192.

⁵² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (United Kingdom: Marshall Pickering) 1987: 636

⁵³ A Treatise on the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants 3:14

sinned in and with him.⁵⁴ This means that all humans being begin life in seriously marred condition (Erickson, 1987:910).

4.2. Universal offer of the Gospel

According to Berkouwer (1960:229) the questions about universal offer of the Gospel, especially in recent times, are concentrated on Karl Barth's doctrine of election, for with him there occurs a peculiar mutation. In original universalism, the issue is a universal offer because Christ died for all, and election remains in the background for the moment. But with Barth, Christ's death touches precisely upon the election of all, which election has become manifest in Christ's death. The universality of the message is no longer at odds with the fact of election, for it is based on the universality of election. The message which is carried into the world forms the transition from those who already know (the believers) to those who do not yet know, but who are nevertheless comprised in the election. Michael Scott Horton (1990:56) is of the opinion that, because of election, we realize that as Christians we do not have to resort to desperate tactics. We know that in the final analysis, it is not our techniques, but God's grace, that determines the outcome of our presentation. With this knowledge we can be more comfortable and free in our witnessing to friends and family. While we have the responsibility to bring them the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in word and deed, they will not go to hell because we failed to cover all the basic points. Instead, we participate in God's plan for bringing people into His Kingdom, knowing that it is God's Spirit, not our personality or persuasion, who ultimately brings a person to Christ.

According to Longenecker (1984:36-37), while respecting certain historical advantages of one people over the other (cf. Rom 3:1-2; 9:4-5), Paul proclaimed a Gospel of "no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles in condemnation before God (Rom 1:18-3:20), "no distinction "between" Jews and Gentiles in access to God (Rom 3:21-5:11), and "no distinction" between Jews and Gentiles in the one body of Christ (Rom 9:1-11:36; cf. Eph 2:11-22). According to Nissen (1999:104) these "no distinction" texts were based on Paul's belief in the universality of Christ: "For there is no distinction between Jew

⁵⁴ Augustine On marriage and Concupiscence 2.15.

and Greek; the same Lord is the Lord of all and is generous to all who call on his name” (Rom 10:12; cf. Gal 3:28). The *kerygma*, as the message of God’s saving act, has an essentially universal quality, and only that explains the universality of the New Testament. “The whole New Testament testimony is pervaded by a tremendous joy: the universality of Christ”.⁵⁵ This cannot be denied because of reactionary feelings against relative and absolute universalism. For this universality of the Gospel is like an arrow directed at a target, and no one is excluded, not even the worst of sinners (1 Tim. 1:16). For Berkouwer (1960:240) the *kerygmatic* universality does not preclude but include the call to belief and repentance. One cannot speak of that universality apart from faith and repentance, and one certainly cannot be casual about it. The apostolic epistles and the missionary practice of the apostles are in agreement in that respect. When Paul preaches God’s act of salvation to the nations, it is announced to “all” that they must repent. The universality of the Gospel comprises this universal call (Acts 17:30; cf 16:31). In this universal *kerygma*, mention is also made of the judgment, to that day on which God will justly judge the earth in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31; cf. 24:25).

“Some people find it hard to understand why God needs people to evangelize if He has already made His decision. The answer is: God does not need us; He has nevertheless chosen to use us. God has not only decided whom He will save, but how He will save them. Evangelism, prayer, the reading and preaching of the Word – these are the all ‘modes of transportation’ that God has ordained for bringing His people to Himself” (Horton, 1990:57). In the light of the foregoing it can no longer be doubted that election of God has a place in preaching. He who thinks that God’s free election should not be discussed, and who wants to keep it a latent doctrine, is not only opposed by the teachings of the New Testament but leaves room for the notion that the doctrine of election casts a shadow over the preaching of salvation. That the idea of a latent doctrine has all too often been entertained can be explained only in terms of a wrong doctrine of election, namely, of a deterministic deformation of it. Such an idea of election had better be abandoned, because it means the undermining of man’s calling and responsibility. This way cannot

⁵⁵ Kittel, *T.W.N.T.*, V, 895

be followed by him who sees election as a gift of God, not based on our works but on grace (Rom. 9:11). If such election is not preached, the Gospel is no longer a Gospel of free and sovereign grace for the Church. The Gospel of free election is a radical exclusion of all self-exaltation. With Paul it was such an essential point that Augustine and Calvin have repeatedly admonished the Church not to be silent about election! Therefore, the solution to all the problems cannot be given by a latent doctrine, but by the Biblical message which delivers us from all determinism and formalism and which admonishes us faithfully to walk the “ways of the elect” (Canons of Dordt, I, 13).

According to Michael Scott Horton (1990:56) two of the most important questions are, “How does election affect our motivation?” “What is the impact of election on evangelism?” Paul, the greatest missionary the church ever had, said, “I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10). He moved from city to city motivated by God’s assurance: “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10). The church of Christ is compelled thus to preach the Gospel (Berkouwer, 1960:252) as Christ gave her **the keys of the Kingdom of God**⁵⁶ where she can open it by proclaiming the Gospel, and close it by practicing church discipline (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 31). The act of God in the preaching of the Gospel by man is not an accidental means God has resorted to. He calls men to this task, to give testimony to that light that has become their salvation. And it is by no means true that the doctrine of election leaves no room for the preaching of the Gospel. Rather, that preaching finds its decisive and only foundation in the free mercy of God.⁵⁷

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to stress the fact that the doctrine of divine election is a real doctrine that cannot be changed by human’s will or ideology. The real fact is that God elected some people to attain eternal life, while others not. When dealing with the doctrine of divine election, foreseen faith and good works, then, are never to be

⁵⁶ Matthew 16:19

⁵⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1960:253

looked upon as the cause of the election. They are rather its fruits and proof. They show that the person has been chosen and regenerated. To make them the basis of election involves us again in a covenant of works, and places God's purposes in time rather than in eternity. This would not be pre-destination but post-destination, an inversion of the Scripture account which makes faith and holiness to be the consequences, and not the antecedents, of election. The statement that we were chosen in Christ "before the foundation of the world", excludes any consideration of merit in us, but means that the thing was done in eternity.

As we know that through the sin of Adam, the entire human race has sinned and is now sinful. In its head, Adam, the entire human race violated God's will and fell from the state of innocence in which God had created mankind. As sinners, we have nothing good that can convince God to elect us. That is why God elected us not because of our good works or merits, but through His grace bestowed in our Lord Jesus Christ. To know that God elected His people to attain eternal life does not mean that we have to relax and forget about proclaiming the Word of God. To know this must encourage us to be aggressive in proclaiming the Word of God to all people, and as a results plant many churches in all areas, rural and urban areas. The other thing that must encourage us to proclaim the Word of God is the fact that we do not know the elect. We have to proclaim the Word of God universally so that all the elect should come to repentance and be saved. The church must understand the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). The Lord one night spoke to Paul in a vision when Paul decided to leave the city of Corinth as the Jews opposed him and became abusive, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."(Acts 18:9-10).

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