

## Corporate Election

*There is a third position  
in the Calvinism-Arminian debate  
about  
predestination and election of the saints.*

*by Phil Myers, PhD*

It is not an overstatement to say that it is the method, not the individual, that is elected.

The Method is Faith.

Those who hold to corporate election have a high view of the sovereignty of God. But, unlike reformed theologians, they do not become perplexed by the relationship between the attribute of God's sovereignty and His act of bestowing a free will upon man.

In these pages I'll try to simplify the issue. "Corporate Election" has been held by multitudes of believers for thousands of years. But it hasn't had good name recognition. As far as I can tell it is the most common explanation held since the start of the Church. Paul explained it in the first century and most Bible teachers [as far as I can tell] have held to it.

Calvinists made the twin mistakes, a.) limited atonement and b.) irresistible grace popular about 500 hundred years ago. Calvin also [popularly] introduced the idea that the free will and sovereignty were assumed to be paradoxes or at least a seeming antinomy. Free will and sovereignty are non-contradictory. One is a decree of God. The other is an attribute of God. In His role as sovereign, God passed the decree that man should have a real opportunity to exercise faith in His Son.

### **Our approach:**

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*Question by Nick: "How can a man be born [again] when he is old?"*

*Answer by Jesus: "believe = everlasting life."*

*Answer by Calvin: "\_\_\_?\_\_\_" [clue: it isn't believe] see p. 9*

## CORPORATE ELECTION

1. The Bible teaches predestination for the believers. I believe it. It assumes that God has predetermined certain things will happen because He alone, as the sovereign, independent God, has chosen what will be so.
2. The Bible does not teach limited atonement. Jesus died for everyone.
3. The Bible teaches us about God's foreknowledge. His Word has made it clear that God knows everything. He knows exactly will happen even before it occurs. Yes, before the foundations of the world God knew who would trust Jesus Christ as Savior and who wouldn't.
4. The Bible also teaches that man has volition as well accountability for decisions he makes about his lifestyle as well as salvation.
5. The Bible teaches foreordination. Nothing catches God by surprise, but not everything goes the way God ordained. That is the reason He can be grieved by the sin of His saints, and why He weeps over those who reject His salvation. He has not ordained the sin of the saints or the unbelief of the unregenerate man. Neither His foreknowledge, nor His foreordination makes everything certain, nor dictates who will believe, or who will sin.

If God's wishes were always done, you and I would always live as He ordains.

*Ephesians 2.10 created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained*

6. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. It avers that He is independent of man. An accurate and simple definition of sovereignty is:

**"GOD MAY DO ANYTHING HE WANTS."**

*He is totally independent.*

*But He doesn't control everything man does.*

Sovereignty is not tranny. God does not rule in the hearts of the unsaved nor the unwilling.

Sovereignty does not mean God always gets His way. Talk to any Christian you know and he will admit he has disobeyed at least one of God's direct commands in the last month, and so God did not get His way in that person's life.

In this paper I will come back to this definition from time to time. God has placed limits on Himself. He has made some decrees which control His own actions. For instance, He has made the decision to provide salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. He cannot provide salvation by any other means. He has limited His actions. It could be said that He has self-imposed limitations on His sovereignty.

**TWENTY-ONE [21] STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO ELECTION**

[biblical support for each point is found in Appendix A, page 6]

The following is an "AGREE / DISAGREE" exercise.

The letters **T U L I P** next to each statement below indicate that the statement pertains specifically to that part of Calvinistic acrostic.

Below, please check the boxes  you pretty much agree with.  
I tried to write each statement for those not familiar with theological language.

I checked every box.

This exercise will help you to evaluate the strength or weakness of my explanations, later.

- a. **T**  Man is entirely depraved and before the eyes of a holy God cannot do any good thing to merit salvation.
- b. **T**  All men are condemned and found guilty before they either accept or reject the Savior. This is not because they have committed sin, but because they are sinners by nature.

- c. **T**  Mankind is dead in trespasses and sins; and although dead, he can either accept Christ's payment or reject it.
- d. **I**  All men have the ability to believe in a savior. If this faith is placed in Christ, the result is everlasting life.
- e. **E**  Christ really did die for the sin of all men.
- f. **T**  Men are personally condemned by the sin of unbelief.
- g. **I**  Salvation is based on belief in Christ's death payment apart from works.
- h.  God is sovereign - He can do anything He wants - and He has no obligation to save anyone.
- i. **U**  In His sovereignty, God has given man a free choice [free will] because that is what God chose to do. Man's free will, which is influenced but not controlled by God, enables man to accept or reject Christ's sacrificial payment.  
Man is responsible to God for the decisions he makes and must accept the results and consequences.
- j. **P**  The destination of all believers is predetermined [*destination is predestinated*]. That is, God has determined that every person who trusts in Him will go to heaven
- k.  God knows everything.
- l. **U**  God's knowledge does not manipulate events or circumstances. His knowledge is an *attribute*. His decrees, on the other hand, are *acts*. There is a great difference between the attributes of God and the acts of God.
- m. **U**  It is God's will that all men place faith in Jesus Christ, however;  
1) God's will is not always done - all men are not saved.  
2) God is no less sovereign because men have not met His demands nor complied with His will.  
Men remain unsaved because they choose to reject God.
- n. **P**  It is God's will that all believers live holy lives, however;  
1) God's will is not always done - all Christians do not live holy lives.  
2) God is no less sovereign because men have not met His demands nor complied with His will.  
Christians remain in their sin because they choose to do so. They use their volition to sin.
- o. **U**  Unbelievers become "chosen ones" through belief as a result of their own choice, not God's.  
The word "chosen" most often refers to a selection by God to use a man for service.
- p. **U**  The word "chosen" may refer to either salvation or service. The context of the word chosen is normally service, rarely salvation.
- q.  Calvinists avow that if man chooses to believe in Christ through his own volition, it takes away glory which should go to God.  
The act of exercising saving faith in Christ does not glorify man any more than the act of exercising daily faith and living a holy life takes glory from God.
- r. **I**  The grace to be saved is extended to all men.
- s. **I**  God's grace is obviously resistible - all men are not saved.
- t.  *Predestination* commonly refers to sanctification of the believer, *not* to the process of justification of unbelievers.

If you marked more than 7 or 8 you have strong Calvinistic leanings. That's okay.

[Scriptural support for each of the above points is given in Appendix A, p. 6]

**FOUR ISSUES WE WILL ADDRESS [briefly]:**

1. **Does God's Foreknowledge Determine How God Acts** [and/or how man acts?]
2. **What is God's Methodology of Electing** [selecting] **Those Who Will Be Saved?**
3. **Can God Limit Himself and Allow Man's Free Will to Determine Man's Own Destiny?**
4. **Is There a Paradox Between Free Will and Sovereignty?** [that is, is "free will" a gift that God may give sovereignly?]

1. Does God's Foreknowledge Determine How He Acts [and how man acts?]

No, His foreknowledge does not dictate His actions. He knows everything but is not responsible for every choice man makes.

God's foreknowledge is an attribute. It is a characteristic of His nature. It describes Who He is.

Predestination [how He provides salvation] is an act or a decree. It describes what He chooses to do.

When we say that God knows all things, we refer to His Omniscience. When we talk about the part of His omniscience which refers to the future, we speak of His Foreknowledge. The mere fact of the existence of His Foreknowledge does not cause things to happen.

For instance, He knows my sin but does not cause it. I am responsible. It is my choice [sovereignly given] which allows me to sin.

2. What is God's methodology of electing [selecting] those who will be saved?

It is agreed by all that only the "elect" will be saved. There seems to be great disagreement as to the mechanics that God has chosen for a man to become "elect."

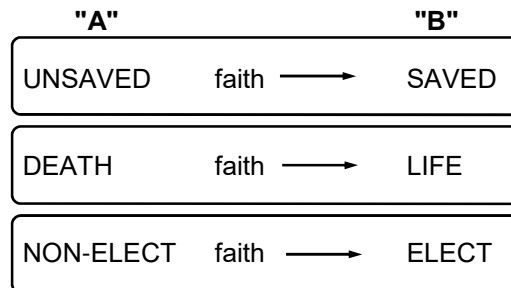
It remains to be answered, "How does someone from column "A" get into column "B" below? The biblical solution is simple. By faith.

We are saved by faith [Ephesians 2.8,9.

We pass from death to life by faith [John 5.24].

We become elect by faith [II Thes. 2.13].

Look at the following diagram. Notice that people move from one group to the next by means of FAITH.



God has predestined [determined beforehand] that men will only be saved by faith. ANY man will be saved by faith. EVERY man will be saved if he puts his faith in Christ. If he has the faith to believe in good works, he also can place that same confidence in Jesus Christ. There is no biblical grounds for believing that a mythical "efficacious grace" is given to some. Not one verse.

God has not predestined that Joe or Harry or Janie will believe, but He has determined that IF they believe they WILL be saved. He has not violated His decision to allow man to make his own choice.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, a Calvinist, even allows that:

On the human side, when a man's opposition to God is divinely broken down, he then believes to the saving of his soul. So demanding and real are the means employed for the saving of the lost that it is as much required of man that he believe and thus *elect to be saved* by the divine grace, as that the actual redemption shall be wrought for him on Calvary. (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, 167.) Emphasis mine.

It has been incorrectly concluded that "Men choose their course pertaining to salvation by what *seems* to them a free will" [*Pink*]. If that statement is true, then men make *all* their choices by what God really wants them to do, and in truth, they cannot be held responsible because they have complied with the decisions of God. If a man does God's will because of what "seems to him a free will" then he has done it because he can do no other. He is a puppet.

The Calvinist position finds itself in a self-made trap. In order to be consistent with this principle, both the saved and the unsaved abide by an apparent free will. However, this precept negates the fact that God has sovereignly given men a choice, and He holds us responsible for our choices. If we choose to sin, we are responsible.

It is not unless we are truly responsible for our sin that God can be freed from the accountability of actually causing us to sin. *God certainly did not foreordain everything He knows.*

I read once that "God could not know as certain [anything] that had not been made certain by foreordination." He knows my sin, but did not predetermine [foreordain] that it would be done. On the other hand, not even everything that God foreordained [decided ahead of time] will be done. He foreordained only good works for the believer [Ephesians 2.10], but believers still sin.

3. Can God limit Himself and allow man's volition to determine man's destiny?

Yes, He can limit Himself.

Many people have a feeling that it is impossible for man to place limits upon God, yet *God has indeed limited Himself*. Because He has decreed that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, He is unable to save man by any other means. In His sovereignty He has placed limits on His willingness to save man.

4. Is There a Paradox Between Free Will and Sovereignty [or is "freedom to choose" a gift that God sovereignly gives?]

No, there is no paradox or antinomy between God's gift of free will and His attribute of sovereignty.

A *paradox* is a statement that seems self-contradictory.

An *antinomy* is an inconsistency between two apparently reasonable principles.

The Calvinistic system of theology pretends there is an antinomy between man's free will and the sovereignty of God. It assumes that God's will is always done [see Appendix A, point m-1]. If I held such an assumption, I too, would find it impossible to reconcile free will and sovereignty.

The problem is that Calvinism compares sovereignty [an attribute of God], with free will [the result of one of God's decrees]. It is like comparing peaches and watermelons. If we begin with a faulty definition of sovereignty we will have an incorrect perception of free will. It is incorrect to assume that God always gets His way.

Remember our working definition of sovereignty: God may do anything he wants.

There is neither a paradox nor an antinomy if we remember that *in His sovereignty* God gives man a choice.

**THE PARABLE OF THE LOCKER ROOM**

Ephesians 1.4 Before the foundation of this team it is determined that football players shall have the privilege of taking up the coach's time and be called "football players."

John 6.40 All players will enter the locker room during half-time, but only players shall enter the locker room at half-time.

John 3.16 The invitation to join the ball team is extended to all men on campus. No one else may rightfully consider himself a football player.

John 3.37,39 This team will never have cuts from the roster. A football player is a special figure on campus. Once a football player - always a football player.

Romans 8.20 It is determined that he will be glorified, sanctified [*set apart on the football field*], and according to the good pleasure of the coach, he will be given a uniform.

Ephesians 1.11 Players have the heritage [*inheritance*] of all football players. This is determined by the coach.

John 12.32 All men are invited to play on the football team.

Romans 8.20 Of those who become football players all are called to play with all their might. Alas, some do not.

Romans 8.29 It is the coach's desire that everybody be conformed to Super Bowl's past MVPs. In the happy training ground beyond the goal post, all shall be.

**APPENDIX A**

Biblical support for  
**THE TWENTY-ONE STATEMENTS PERTAINING TO ELECTION**

NOT ALL OF THESE STATEMENTS CARRY EQUAL WEIGHT.

a. Man is entirely depraved and before the eyes of a holy God cannot do any good thing to merit salvation.

Isaiah 64.6 ". . . and all our righteousness deeds are like a filthy garment."

b. All men are condemned and found guilty before they either accept or reject the Savior. This is not because they have committed sin, but because they are sinners by nature.

John 3.18 ". . . he who does not believe has been judged already."

c. Mankind is dead\* in trespasses and sins; and although dead, he can either accept Christ's payment or reject it.

Ephesians 2.1,5,8 "and you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . even when we were dead. . . (He) made us alive . . . through faith."

Colossians 2.13 ". . . when you were dead . . . He made you alive."

\* At this point Calvinism does some strange things with the terms "born again" and "believe."  
See Appendix B to find out why they think you have to be born again before you can be saved.

d. All men have the ability to believe in a savior. If this faith is placed in Christ, the result is everlasting life.

John 3.16 ". . . whoever believes."

Acts 16.31 "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Romans 10.9 "If you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."

John 6.47 "He who believes has eternal life."

e. Christ really did die for the sin of all men.

Revelation 22.17 "Let the one who wishes take the water of life freely."

I Timothy 2.6 "Who gave Himself as a ransom for all."

Hebrews 2.9 "By the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

I John 2.2 "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

f. Men are personally condemned by the sin of unbelief.

John 3.18 "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

g. Salvation is based on belief in Christ's death payment apart from works.

Ephesians 2.8,9 "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

*see my blog, [PhilMyersBlog.com](http://PhilMyersBlog.com) 211 NT Verses, Salvation by Faith Alone*

h. God is sovereign - He can do anything he wants - and He has no obligation to save anyone.

*This is the working definition of sovereignty used in this paper. Enough said.*

i. In His sovereignty, God has given man a free choice [free will] because that is what God wanted to do.

Man's free will, which is influenced but not controlled by God, enables man to accept or reject Christ's sacrificial payment.

John 5.40 ". . . and you are unwilling to come to Me that you may have life."

There are 110 "whosoever wills" in the New Testament. These are always with unrestricted meaning.

To say that man has the power to choose [i.e. a will that is free] is not to say that God isn't able to influence man's will. He certainly puts the thumb screws on those who disobey, but He does not force obedience. They obey or disobey by their own choice. In the same sense, God does not cause some to receive His salvation, but they believe or reject Him according to their own choice.

God sometimes hardens those who have already hardened themselves. [Exodus 7.13]

j. The destination of all believers is predetermined. That is, God has determined that any person who trusts in Him will go to heaven

John 14.3 "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am ye shall be also."

k. God knows everything.

Hebrews 4.13 "All things are open and laid bare [before His eyes]."

He knows perfectly and eternally all that is knowable, whether actual or possible. Jesus even stated that some people would have been saved if they had seen Jesus' miracles. They had the ability to believe, but not the opportunity.

Matthew 11.21 "Woe, to you Chorazin. Woe, to you Bethsaida. For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

i. God's knowledge does not manipulate events or circumstances. His knowledge is an *attribute*. His decrees, on the other hand, are *acts*. There is a great difference between the attribute of God's omniscience and the acts of God.  
Things do not happen merely because God knows what will happen. I do not sin *because* God foreknew that I would sin.

m. It is God's will that all men place faith in Jesus Christ, however;  
1) *God's will is not always done* - all men are not saved.  
2) God is no less sovereign because men have not met His demands nor complied with His will.  
Men remain unsaved because they choose to do so.  
I Timothy 2.4 ". . . Who desires all men to be saved."

n. It is God's will that all believers live holy lives, however;  
1) *God's will is not always done* - all Christians do not live holy lives.  
2) God is no less sovereign because men have not met His demands nor complied with His will.  
Christians remain in their sin because they choose to do so.  
Ephesians 2.10 "[we are] created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath *before ordained* that we should walk in them."

o. Unbelievers become "chosen ones" through "faith in the truth" as a result of their own choice, not God's. God chooses the method. Man has the option.  
II Thessalonians 2.13 ". . . God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

p. The word "chosen" may refer to either salvation or service.

THE CALL TO SERVICE:

I Corinthians 1.26,27 "God has chosen . . . to shame the things which are strong."

John 15.16 "But I chose you . . . that you should go and bear fruit."

Hebrews 11.8 "[Abraham] was called . . . to receive [land] for an inheritance."

I Peter 1.1,2 "Who are chosen . . . that you may obey."

Romans 9.11-13 "God's purpose according to His choice. The older *shall serve* the younger."  
Verse 12 was written concerning the *birth* of the boys [Gen. 25.23]. Verse 13 show God's holy displeasure with the life of Esau and is a commentary on the hatred God had for Esau's sin. It is Esau's epitaph.

Ephesians 1.3-5 "He chose us . . . that we should be holy . . . He predestined us to adoption as sons."

THE CALL TO SALVATION:

I Timothy 2.4 "[He] desires all men to be saved."

John 12.32 "I will draw all men. . . ."

II Peter 3.9 "The Lord . . . [is] not willing for any to perish, but for all men to come to repentance."

Revelation 22.17 "Let the one who wishes take of the water of life freely."

John 3.15 "...that whosoever believes in Him...."

q. The act of exercising saving faith in Christ does not glorify man any more than the act of exercising daily faith glorifies man. God still receives the glory when men are saved.  
The fact that this choice belongs to man does not glorify man and take glory from God [as some Calvinists say]. Man receives ability and responsibility from God and it *magnifies* God's sovereignty to see man exercise free will.

r. The grace to be saved is extended to all men.  
Titus 2.11 "The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men."

John 1.9 "[Jesus] was the true light which coming into the world lighteth all men."

s. God's grace is resistible - all men are not saved.  
Matthew 23.27 "How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling."

Galatians 2.21 "I do not nullify the grace of God."  
Paul was unwilling to nullify, or make God's grace ineffective, by rejecting it, but it is evident from the passage that he could have nullified God's grace if he had appealed to the Law for his salvation.

t. *Predestination* commonly refers to sanctification of the believer, *not* to the process of justification of unbelievers.



## APPENDIX B

I refute this Calvinistic statement:  
**“You Must be Born-Again BEFORE You Can Be Saved”**

*This is Calvinism's real position on Salvation.*

I've only once ever heard a Calvinist preach publicly what he actually believes about the new birth's relationship to salvation. In fact, Calvinism teaches that a man must be born again before he can be saved. He is regenerated before he believes. He can't believe until the Holy Spirit gives him some kind of faith. Divine faith that no one but the “born again” [*but not saved*] person has. But don't expect to hear this proclaimed in a sermon; however, you can read it in the literature.

I call you to affirm that one of the hermeneutical principle states that we are to understand less clear passages by truths taught in the more clear ones. The Calvinistic position violates this principle here.

Consider the following verse.

And you hath He quickened who were dead                      in trespasses and sins.                      Ephesians 2.1

The argument is put forth that dead men can do *absolutely nothing* - they can make no spiritual decisions. While this is certainly true when we speak of physical death, it is not true of spiritually dead men. In the very next two verses [*Eph 2.2,3*] Paul affirms that spiritually dead men are capable of making spiritual decisions which displease God.

Spiritually dead men:

- a.) are capable of prayer [Cornelius, Acts 10],
- b.) they are able to weigh the claims of Christ and accept or reject the truth,
- c.) they can worship, and
- d.) they can turn to God.

Calvinism teaches that a man is *so dead* he cannot even believe in the death payment of Jesus. The doctrine holds that in order to to believe, man must be granted a special kind of "life" *before* he is able to believe in Christ. He is regenerated by the Spirit *before* he is saved. He is born again *before* he receives this special "faith" to believe.

The Calvinistic system\* holds that when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, He makes us a child of God and gives us eternal life. Afterwards, we receive faith to believe, and then we can believe in Christ as our savior. We deny this reasoning.

Calvinism teaches the progression is this:

First, we are born dead - unable to believe	Eph 2.1
Second, we must be born again by the Holy Spirit [ <i>regenerated, become child of God</i> ]	
I Pet 1.23 II Cor 5.17	
Third, we are endowed with a special faith	Eph 2.8
Fourth, we believe in Jesus as our Savior	John 3.16
Fifth, we are saved, justified, forgiven	John 3.16

Logically, it is a tight little system, but unfortunately it doesn't harmonize with the clearest teaching about the new birth [John chapter 3].

\* It is not to be assumed that every so-called Calvinist holds to this system, but it is the party line. I have listened to sermons preached by men who I know hold to this progression, but in public they refuse to spell out their teaching this clearly.

It was not the purpose of this paper to answer each point of the Calvinistic or Arminian positions, but simply to dovetail the pieces of the puzzle that seem to need a little bit of explanation.

The nice thing about the Corporate Election position, is that it agrees with the understanding of the majority of believers through history. God has made His message simple enough for most people to understand it. Sometimes we theologians make some pretty clear teachings rather complicated.

This response has dealt entirely with the teachings of Calvinism.

For my answer to the Arminian position of "Conditional Security" which posits that works are necessary for salvation in addition to faith, please:

*see my blog [PhilMyersBlog.com](http://PhilMyersBlog.com) [Yes, We Are! No! We're Not!](#)*