

# Oh, the Luck That Saves Us?

by David Servant

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*God's choice of people is conditional, based on their choices and actions, and not random or unconditional.*

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 16:7, Isaiah 55:7, Matthew 22:14, Acts 1:24, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 Peter 1:1

**Topics:** "Divine Election", "Predestination"

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## Description

David Servant preaches about God's intentional and calculated choices, using the example of David being chosen as king of Israel based on his heart. He discusses the concept of God choosing believers before the foundation of the world, emphasizing that God's foreknowledge allows Him to make these choices. David challenges the idea of unconditional election, highlighting that God's choices are not random but based on conditions, such as repentance and belief in Jesus. He explores how conditional choices are evident in Scripture, like God choosing Judas and the apostles selecting Matthias based on specific criteria.

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## Transcript

God chooses people. He chose a man named David, for example, to be a king of Israel.

Quite obviously, God's choice of David was not a random choice. He didn't draw straws up in heaven. Rather, God's choice of David was a calculated, intelligent choice. He saw something in David that He liked. Specifically, He liked David's heart, and for that reason, God chose him (see 1 Sam. 13:13-14, 16:6-12; Acts 13:22).

Scripture also tells us that God chose all of us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we're told that we've been chosen before we were born, and even before the foundation of the world:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

Naturally, because God foreknows everything and everyone, He is able to choose people even before they're born. Peter wrote that we're "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God" (see 1 Pet. 1:1-2).

In the past, friends of mine have tried to persuade me to believe that God's long-ago choice of us was not based upon anything He foresaw in us that He liked. Rather, they say that God's choice of us was an unconditional election. That is, foreknowing everyone, God long ago chose certain people for salvation, and His reason for choosing some and not choosing others had nothing to do with any conditions which those foreknown people did or did not meet.

If this is true, then God's choice of some and not others was a random selection. An unconditional election is no different than a random selection. This cannot be argued against intelligently.

When I voted in the last election, I chose the candidates who met my conditions, as did everyone else who voted. It was a "conditional election." If, while I stood in the voting booth, I selected candidates for no reason, then it could only be said that I voted randomly. Had everyone else voted randomly as well, it would have been an "unconditional election." Similarly, if God's election of us was unconditional, that means we were randomly chosen to be saved, while others were randomly chosen not to be saved, which is another way of saying that they were randomly chosen to be damned. Our salvation was therefore determined before we were born by a roll of the dice as it were. That also means that some people were doomed for damnation by a roll of the dice before they were born.

But let me go one step further. If you are one of the ones whom God unconditionally elected, you are not only blessed, you are also lucky, because you were randomly selected rather than someone else who was not. That also means that your being selected was at the expense of someone else who was not selected, since God obviously only selected a limited number. Your guaranteed salvation meant someone else's guaranteed damnation, because you gained a "salvation slot" that could have been just as well gained by someone else.

This theology of unconditional election is most often supported by those verses in the New Testament which say that we are "called," or "chosen" or "elected." It seems quite odd, however, that those three words, which are most often used in the English language and in human experience to express a conditional selection, are suddenly interpreted to express an unconditional, random selection. What right does anyone have to force such an unnatural meaning upon those plain words?

When you call someone or do not call someone, you have a reason for it, and it has something to do with the people you call or do not call. It is a conditional calling. When you choose one person and do not choose another person, you do it for a reason, and it has something to do with the qualities of the people. It is a conditional choice. When you elect a candidate, you elect him or her for a reason, and it has something to do with the qualifications of the candidates. It is a conditional election.

Thus, when scripture says that we've been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, why can't it simply mean that God chose us because long ago He knew that we, under the conviction of His Spirit and by an act of our God-given free wills, would repent and believe in the Lord Jesus? Why would we ever interpret such plain words to mean that God randomly selected us?

The concept of God's conditional choice of all who believe in Jesus harmonizes beautifully with what the rest of the Bible plainly teaches about God, humanity and salvation, while the idea of God's unconditional choice of all who believe in Jesus contradicts so much of what the Bible teaches regarding God, humanity and salvation. If one believes that God has unconditionally elected some to be saved, one must come up with bizarre interpretations for the thousands of scriptures that support the concepts of humanity's free will and God's universal love.

#### Some Scriptural Examples of God's Conditional Choices

Judas, who was foreknown by God, was also chosen by God to be one of the twelve. God knew that Judas would ultimately choose to betray Jesus. God chose Judas based on the choices Judas would make, yet another example of a conditional choice on God's part.

When the apostles selected candidates to replace Judas after his suicide, their selection was also conditional. The replacement, they believed, had to be a person who had been with them from the beginning of Jesus' ministry (see Acts 1:20-22). They narrowed it down to two, Barsabbas and Matthias, men who both met the apostles' condition.

Then they asked God which of those two He had chosen. They clearly believed that His selection would also be conditional, because they prayed, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen" (Acts 1:24, emphasis added). They knew that God chooses people conditionally, based on what He knows about their hearts.

Thus it is apparent (once again) that just because we read in Scripture that someone is chosen, it is purely an assumption to conclude that it means he was chosen unconditionally.

Anytime God declares in Scripture that He will do something if people will first do something themselves, that is an example of one of His conditional choices. And the salvation that God freely offers to everyone has always been conditional:

Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Is. 55:7).

Scores of other verses of Scripture could be cited that illustrate this same principle of God's conditional choice in relationship to the salvation of people. So I again ask, What gives anyone a right to conclude, against the tenor of what the entire Bible says about salvation, that certain verses in the New Testament which speak of God's choice of believers are referring to an unconditional, random choice?

What About Romans 9-11?

There are a few verses in the eleventh chapter of Romans, a favorite chapter of Scripture for those who promote the idea of unconditional election, that illustrate beautifully what I'm saying. There Paul makes reference to a story about Elijah, who once complained to God that he was the only person serving Him, because it seemed that everyone in Israel was serving Baal. The Lord, however, encouraged Elijah by telling him, "I have kept for myself seven-thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:4, c.f. 1 Kings 19:18). Paul then comments: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Rom. 11:5).

At the time of Elijah's crisis, God "kept for Himself," what was obviously His decision, seven-thousand men. But His choice of those seven-thousand men was obviously based upon their choice of Him. They had refused to bow their knees to Baal. That was their choice. So God's choice of them was conditional.

Paul then drew a parallel: "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Rom. 11:5, emphasis added). It was a minority of Jews in Paul's day who had believed in Jesus, a "remnant," chosen by God. But God's choice of them was based on their choice of Jesus, a conditional choice on God's part, just as was true of the remnant in Elijah's time.

If Paul was arguing in Romans 9-11, as some of my friends claimed, that people are saved purely because of God's unconditional choice, then we would have to believe that Paul was not too smart, as he would grossly be contradicting so much of what he wrote in chapters 1 through 8 (not to mention much of what he wrote in chapters 9-11). Chapters 9 through 11 are not Paul's defense of God's unconditional election of individuals for salvation. Rather, those chapters are part of Paul's response to the grand Jewish

objection to his gospel. In spite of what many Jews wanted to accept, God had sovereignly chosen to extend His grace to Gentiles, saving those who believed, even though they were not circumcised, not descended from Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, and had generally not lived in obedience to the Mosaic Law. Salvation was not, as most Jews believed, the result of works, but the result of God's choice to extend His grace to any sinner who would believe, Gentile or Jew. Believing Gentiles and Jews are those who are chosen, conditionally, by God.

### Predestined

But does not the New Testament also teach that believers have been predestined as well as chosen? Does not the idea of predestination denote more than just a conditional choice by God, but rather a predetermination by God that is beyond our control and outside the bounds of our free will?

Certainly the New Testament tells us, in two passages, that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been predestined. But it never tells us that we have been predestined to be saved (expressing the same concept as an "unconditional election"). For example, in Romans 8, Paul wrote of believers:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified (Rom. 8:26-30).

Take note that Paul is speaking of those who love God. Love is a choice, and if there is no opportunity for choice, there is no such thing as love. Robots can't love. God doesn't program people to love Him; He commands everyone to love Him with all their hearts. Whether they do or don't is their choice. God woos everyone, but He forces no one.

Those who have yielded to God's wooing and have chosen to love Him are the same people who are "foreknown," "predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son," "called," "justified" and "glorified." Notice it all begins with God's foreknowledge of those who would love Him.

Paul also wrote something about our being predestined in his letter to the Ephesians. But he never said that we are predestined to be saved. Rather, Paul wrote that God "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus" (Eph. 1:5). God predestined us, those whom He foreknew would believe in Jesus, to be adopted into His family.

### A Simple Parable

Perhaps the easiest-to-understand illustration in Scripture that explains why some people are saved and why others are not is Jesus' own Parable of the Wedding Feast (see Matt. 22:1-14). It is so simple that only a theologian could misunderstand it!

You will recall that a king gave a wedding feast for his son, yet those who had been invited were unwilling to come, and many suffered the king's wrath because of it. Clearly, it was their own choice to refuse the invitation, not the king's secret predestined choice, which is why he became angry at them for their refusal. If their refusal was really the king's choice, he would have no right to be angry at them, as they would have only been doing what he predestined.

Then the king sent his servants out into the "highways and byways" to gather all kinds of people until the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king looked over the wedding guests, he found one who wasn't wearing the wedding clothes (clothes that would have been provided by the king). The king became angry again, and that man was cast "into the outer darkness" where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13).

Jesus concluded the parable by saying, "For many are called [or invited, as the margin of Bible indicates], but few are chosen." That summary applies to the entire parable, not just the final scene. The king invited many people, but he ultimately chose only a few---those who met his conditions. His choice of them was based on their choices, a conditional election. So it is in regard to salvation. God invites many to His Son's wedding feast, but not all whom He invites does He also choose, because they don't meet his conditions.

A New Bible Version?

My friends who hold to the idea of unconditional election not only have to force an unnatural meaning on the word chosen when it is found in the New Testament, they must also sometimes redefine other words to mean the exact opposite of what they normally mean---words like any, all, world and whoever.

If anyone ever comes out with an Unconditional Election Bible, it will be filled with some very interesting verses. 2 Peter 3:9 will have to read:

God wills that many should perish, and that only a few pre-selected ones will come to repentance.

And John 3:16 will have to read:

For God so randomly loved a minority of people in the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that when those random, pre-selected minority of people believe in Him as they are predestined to do, they will not perish, but have everlasting life.

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