

Coming in the Back Door

Another Way to Arrive at the Biblical Doctrine of Election

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The Front Door The most simple way to see what Scripture says about election is to begin with texts that talk about election. I call this the “front door”. Some examples: The Lord taught election when He said that all the persons the Father had given Him would come to Him (John 6:37). They would be drawn by and taught by the Father (John 6:44,45). Peter says that believers are chosen (1 Peter 1:1; 2:9). Paul taught that Christians were chosen by grace (Romans 11:5), and the text many would turn to first is Ephesians 1:3-5, 11:

God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons ... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will ...”

I call texts like those the “front door”. They take the reader *directly* to the doctrine. But there is another way.

The Back Door A host of NT texts make clear that man is *unable* to respond to the gospel, which, nevertheless, he must do in order to be saved. There are saved people. Grasping this reality will lead us to election by the back door. Our studies in Romans teach that the sinner is in bondage to his sin. Speaking of Christians *before* conversion, Paul says, “ ... You were once slaves of sin” (Romans 6:17,20). That slavery was to impurity and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness (6:19).

Then in Romans 8:5-8 Paul elaborates on the condition of the non-Christian:

... Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it does not submit to God's law; **indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Now connect this hostility to God in Romans 8 to the need of faith in Hebrews 11:6: “ ... *without faith it is impossible to please him*, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Really! In order to please God, one must have faith, according to Hebrews 11, BUT those in the flesh cannot please God, according to Romans 8, so sinners are not able to meet the required condition of faith, which is essential to their justification. If no one is able to believe, no one can be saved. Neither will a man seek Him as he must, for “no one seeks for God” (Romans 3:11). Would someone who is hostile to God (Romans 8) ever draw near to Him (as in Hebrews 11)? The solution for this impasse is the mighty Shepherd Who seeks the lost sheep.

The Bible is just as explicit elsewhere about man's inability to respond to the Lord. In John 6:35 believing is presented as *coming*, but no one on his own can come. He **cannot** come unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). The Lord's use of “cannot” shows up in other places. To Nicodemus He said unless a man has already been born from above (or born again) He *cannot* see and *cannot* enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). He said the Pharisees *cannot* hear His word (John 8:43); the crowd *cannot* believe (John 12:39), and the world *cannot* receive the

Spirit (John 14:17). The apostle said unbelievers *cannot* understand (1 Corinthians 2:14). [For more on this, see my notes on John 3 on my website: www.grebeweb.com/linden]

Yet it is true that the many believers the Lord has have come, have heard, have believed, and we please God in doing so. But if those who cannot come do, there must be an explanation. It is this: We believe because of God's will "... He brought us forth by the word of truth ..." (James 1:18). Through Him we are believers (1 Peter 1:21). Peter says further that Christians have been born again (which is not something we do to ourselves!) through the living Word of God (1 Peter 1:23). It is because of Him [God] that we are in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30). We conclude that our salvation is entirely because of the active intervention of God in the case of each individual person who is saved. Note in Titus 3 the change God produces in ungodly people.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7, ESV)

But we must ask: Has God intervened with such a conversion for everyone? He has not. Only those whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life escape punishment for their sins. "... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:5) The names in this book were written there before the world began (Revelation 13:8), and we were not there to add our names. So we find that people who cannot be saved because of their bondage to sin are saved not because of any inclination in them to accept Christ. Instead, they are objects of God's gracious salvation. (See Romans 9:15,16.)

In Romans 6 God can make sinners alive to Himself and He does. He can join us to Christ so we will have a new life (v.4). We did not unite ourselves to Christ; instead *we have been united* to Him (v.5), which results in us being no longer enslaved to sin (v.6). Sin no longer has dominion over us (v.14), so we have been made able to believe: "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." (vv.17,18)

And now in Romans 8 You believers are in the Spirit (v.9). If you belong to Christ, you have the Spirit of Christ (v.9). That Spirit is life (v.10). He dwells in us (v.11). All those who are led by the Spirit are sons or daughters of God (v.14). You have received the Spirit of adoption (v.15) Who bears witness with our spirits that we are God's children. Salvation involves a radical change in those once enslaved in sin – a change no sinner can produce, but God does.

Man's inability to believe can only be overcome by the power of God if He graciously chooses to do so. Our bondage to sin is broken when we are united to Christ, and it is God alone Who does the uniting. Otherwise we cannot be saved. Does He do this for every soul on earth? No, indeed. He does it for those He has chosen to save. Those appointed by the Lord to eternal life believe (Acts 13:48). God has done the appointing. For them He intervenes to release from bondage. So we move from saying none can be saved, to saying that those who are must have been chosen by Him. The Back Door perspective stems from the inability of all mankind to respond in faith, therefore we know that when a person does believe, it is only because God has chosen to show compassion to that person. "... He has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." (Romans 9:18)