

Does God Only Enable the Elect to Believe and the Rest is Up to Them?

"God has enabled some; if they believe, they will be saved. If they have the ability to be saved and they refuse to believe, they will not be saved. These people God has enabled or chosen are considered his "elect." This goes with John 3:16 and also with election verses. This also goes with Matthew 18:14 that God is not willing that any should be lost. His call is irrevocable (Romans 11:29), the offer always stands if you choose to believe in him. His call is the offer that enables us to believe, but salvation is revocable if we fall away (Romans 11:19-21)." (Chad Wagner, 2004)

- I. This sermon will refute the sincere, but nevertheless faulty, belief of the young, unconverted Chad Wagner when he was in the early stages of learning the doctrine of Sovereign Grace in 2004.
 1. I had believed in Arminian, freewill salvation for my entire life until December of 2003.
 - A. It was then that I first heard of the doctrine of election.
 - B. I immediately argued against it vehemently (in ignorance) and then embarked on a quest to disprove it with the Bible.
 - C. After a few months of reading through the New Testament and studying diligently to try to understand how election and freewill fit together I thought I had it figured out.
 - D. The quote at the top of the outline is a statement that I wrote down on a piece of notebook paper in 2004.
 2. Let's refute my former self, line by line.
- II. *God has enabled some; if they believe, they will be saved.*
 1. By *enabled* I meant that God had given some people the ability to believe the gospel.
 2. By *saved* I meant eternal salvation.
 3. By this time, I could see that the Bible taught election, but it also appeared to teach that salvation was conditioned upon man's belief.
 4. What I failed to understand was that the "enabling" of the elect *is eternal salvation*.
 - A. I thought that those that were "enabled" were not yet saved eternally, but nevertheless had the ability to hear, understand, and believe the gospel.
 - B. But if the "enabled" ones did nothing, they would die in their sins.
 5. My faulty belief was ultimately a consequence of my lack of understanding of the fallen nature of man.
 - A. The Bible teaches that fallen man in his natural state cannot hear (**Joh 8:43, 47**), understand (**Rom 3:11**), receive (**1Co 2:14**), nor believe the gospel (**Joh 10:26**).
 - B. Neither can the natural man seek God (**Rom 3:11**), do anything good (**Rom 3:12**), nor fear God (**Rom 3:18**).
 - C. This is because the natural man is spiritually *dead* (**Eph 2:1**).
 - i. Life is power.
 - ii. If a man has no power to do the spiritual things listed above (hearing, understanding, receiving, and believing the gospel; and seeking God, fearing God, and doing good), then he has no spiritual life and is therefore spiritually dead.

- D. In order to be able to hear, understand, receive, believe, and seek and fear God, he has to be made alive spiritually which gives him power to do those things.
 - i. The Bible calls this being born again (**Joh 3:3**), quickened (**Col 2:13**), begotten again (**1Pe 1:3**), regenerated (**Tit 3:5**), renewed (**Col 3:10**), and made a new creature (**Eph 2:10 c/w Eph 4:24 c/w 2Co 5:17**).
 - ii. When a man who is dead in sins is regenerated he is given eternal life (**Joh 5:25 c/w Joh 5:24**).
 - iii. A man who has been given eternal life has been eternally saved (**Joh 10:28**).
- E. Regeneration is the "enabling" which gives a man the ability to believe the gospel.
 - i. A man who *hears* and *believes* (present tense) the gospel *is passed* (present perfect tense) from death unto life (**Joh 5:24**).
 - ii. A man who believes that Jesus is the Christ *is* (not becomes) *born of God* (**1Jo 5:1**).
 - iii. In other words, those that have the ability to believe are already saved eternally.
- F. Let's come at it from a different angle.
 - i. In order to believe one has to first hear with understanding (**Rom 10:14**).
 - a. The natural man cannot hear nor understand the gospel (**Joh 8:43, 47; 1Co 2:14**).
 - b. Therefore, the natural man is incapable of believing the gospel.
 - ii. In order to find God and the truth of the gospel, one must first seek for it (**Mat 7:7-8**).
 - a. The natural man cannot and will not seek after God (**Rom 3:11; Joh 5:40**).
 - b. Therefore, the natural man will not find the truth of God in order to believe it.
 - iii. Thus the natural man must be regenerated by God in order to have the ability to seek God and to hear and understand the gospel so that he will be able to believe it.
 - a. Regeneration which enables one to believe is eternal life which is eternal salvation.
 - b. Therefore, if one has been enabled to believe, he already has eternal life and eternal salvation.
 - c. Therefore, belief of the gospel is the *evidence* of eternal salvation, not the *cause* of it.

III. *If they have the ability to be saved and they refuse to believe, they will not be saved.*

1. As we have seen already, if a man has the ability to believe, then he is already saved eternally.
2. Eternal life cannot be lost (**Joh 10:28-29**).
3. Eternal *adj.* - 1. a. Infinite in past and future duration; without beginning or end; that always has existed and always will exist: esp. of the Divine Being. 3. a. Infinite in future duration; that always will exist; everlasting, endless. ¶The New Testament expressions eternal life, death, punishment, etc. are here referred to sense 3, this being the sense in which the *adj.* in such contexts is ordinarily taken.

4. Even if the elect don't believe the gospel, they are still saved eternally (**Rom 3:3-4; 2Ti 2:13; Rom 11:29**).
5. Another thing I failed to understand is that there are two salvations in the Bible: eternal and temporal.
 - A. Eternal salvation is the work of God alone and not conditioned on man's faith or other works (**2Ti 1:9; Tit 3:5**).
 - B. Temporal salvation from things like ignorance, trying to save ourselves, and the consequences of sin in this life is conditioned on man's faith and other works (**Rom 10:1-9; 1Ti 4:16; etc.**).
 - C. If we refuse to believe the gospel we will not be saved temporally in this life (**Heb 3:17-19**).
 - D. But we can never lose our eternal salvation because it is *eternal*.

IV. *These people God has enabled or chosen are considered his "elect."*

1. This statement is true.
2. Although my understanding of "enabling" was incorrect.
3. But this statement taken with the previous one is self-contradictory.
 - A. If the "enabled" ones are the elect, and they can choose to not believe and therefore not be saved eternally, then some of the elect will not be saved eternally according to my former idea.
 - B. This doctrine is false because all of the elect whom God foreknew and predestinated will without the loss of one be glorified in heaven (**Rom 8:29-30**).
 - C. The elect are elected unto the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (**1Pe 1:2**).
 - i. Those covered by the blood of Christ are eternally saved (**Heb 9:12**).
 - ii. Those that are covered by the blood of Christ are forgiven of their sins by His grace (**Eph 1:7**).
 - iii. Therefore, all of the elect will be saved eternally.
 - D. None of the elect will be lost eternally (**Joh 6:39**).

V. *This goes with John 3:16 and also with election verses.*

1. I meant that my idea was not in contradiction with Joh 3:16 and election verses.
2. In actuality, my idea was not taught by either Joh 3:16 or the election verses.
3. Joh 3:16 is not a formula that a sinner follows to get eternal life like most people think.
4. *For God so loved the world.*
 - A. Who is the world whom God loved?
 - B. The "world" in **Joh 3:16** is not the entire human race.
 - C. *The world* doesn't always mean the entire human race in scripture (**Luk 2:1**).
 - i. World *n.* - The inhabitants of the earth, or a section of them.
 - ii. Does God love all the inhabitants of the earth, or only a section of them?
 - a. If it can be shown from the scripture that God *hates anyone*, then that necessarily means that He *doesn't love everyone*, which means that the world that He loves is only a section of the inhabitants of the earth.
 - b. Love *v.* - 1. a. *trans.* With personal obj. or one capable of personification: To bear love to; to entertain a great affection or regard for; to hold dear.

- c. Hate v. - 1. *trans.* To hold in very strong dislike; to detest; to bear malice to. The opposite of *to love*.
 - iii. God hates *sinner*s (*workers* of iniquity) (**Psa 5:4-5**).
 - a. God hates the wicked (**Psa 11:5**).
 - b. God not only hates wicked people who have rejected Him, He hates all sinners from the womb whom He didn't elect to save (**Rom 9:11-13**).
 - c. Since *hate* is the opposite of *love*, God cannot both love the entire human race and hate many of them at the same time.
 - d. Therefore, the world whom God loved is *a section* of the human race.
 - iv. Whom does God love?
 - a. God loves His elect whom He chose before the foundation of the world (**Eph 1:4; Rom 8:28-39; Jer 31:3**).
 - b. Therefore, the world whom God loved is the world of His elect which is a section of the human race *out of* every nation and people: "the world" *distributively*, not *collectively* (**Rev 5:9; Rev 7:9; Rev 13:16 c/w Rev 20:4**).
5. *Whosoever believeth in him*: who can believe in Christ?
- A. All men are born dead in sin (**Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1**).
 - B. In this condition they can't hear (**Joh 8:43, 47**), understand (**Rom 3:10-11**), nor believe the gospel (**1Co 2:14**).
 - C. Only those which are saved can believe the preaching of the cross (**1Co 1:18**).
 - i. If a person believes in Christ, it's only because he had already passed from death unto life prior to hearing it (**Joh 5:24; 1Jo 5:1; 1Jo 4:15**).
 - ii. Therefore, whosoever believes in Jesus Christ shows the evidence that they shall not perish, but *have* eternal life.
 - D. The verse doesn't say that whosoever believeth *gets, acquires, attains, or earns* everlasting life.
 - E. It says that he *has* it.
 - i. Eternal life comes prior to believing (**Joh 5:24**).
 - ii. Believing is the evidence that one has eternal life.
 - iii. All that believe in Christ *are justified* (not *get justified*) (**Act 13:39**).
 - F. Those who looked upon the serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness were saved from death (**Joh 3:14 c/w Num 21:8-9**).
 - i. Looking upon the serpent was only beneficial to those who were alive, not to those who were already dead.
 - ii. In similar fashion, because Christ was lifted up and died on the cross, those who believe on Him shall not perish because they are passed from death unto life.
 - iii. Just as Israel later turned the brass serpent into an idol (**2Ki 18:4**), so likewise people today have made their faith in Christ an idol which they think saves them.
6. It was God *giving* His Son, not their belief in Him, which saved the world of God's elect and gave them eternal life (**Joh 6:37-39; Rom 5:6-10; Rom 5:19; Rom 8:3; 2Co 5:21; Gal 4:4-5; 1Pe 2:24**).
7. What does our belief accomplish?

- A. Our belief doesn't get us eternal life since only those who are saved and have eternal life can believe.
 - B. Those that believe the gospel are those whom God ordained to eternal life (**Act 13:48**).
 - C. Our belief identifies us as part of the world whom God loved and for whom He gave His Son to die.
 - D. Our belief in Christ is the evidence and assurance that we are of the elect whom God gave to Christ and sent Him to die for (**Joh 17:2-4**).
8. Joh 3:16 is not a formula to follow to get eternal life, but is rather a wonderful promise to those who believe in Christ that God loves them, gave His Son for them, and saved them eternally so that they shall not perish, but *have* everlasting life.
9. If we believe in the Son of God, we have the assurance that we have eternal life.

VI. *This also goes with Matthew 18:14 that God is not willing that any should be lost.*

- 1. This statement is erroneous on many levels.
- 2. Firstly, it makes no sense.
 - A. If **Mat 18:14** is teaching that God is not willing that any of His elect should be lost eternally, then why would He come up with a scheme that left eternal salvation up to man's decision as I then believed?
 - B. If it is God's will that all the elect be saved eternally, then why did He, in the words of the young, ignorant Chad Wagner, devise a condition that states if "*they refuse to believe, they will not be saved*"?
- 3. Secondly, Mat 18:14 was used out of context and is not referring to eternal salvation.
 - A. In Mat 18:14 Jesus was referring to little children who believed in Him (**Mat 18:6**).
 - i. Believers have eternal life (**Joh 6:47**).
 - ii. Therefore, these little ones had eternal life.
 - iii. Eternal life is *eternal*, and those that have it *cannot* perish (**Joh 10:28**).
 - iv. Therefore, these little ones were not in danger of perishing eternally.
 - B. Jesus was therefore referring to *temporal* perishing in this life (**ex: Luk 13:4-5; Mat 8:25**).
 - C. God is not willing that any of His children should perish temporally, but that they all should come to repentance (**2Pe 3:9**).

VII. *His call is irrevocable (Romans 11:29), the offer always stands if you choose to believe in him.*

- 1. It is true that God's calling is without repentance, meaning that God will not change His mind regarding it (**Rom 11:29**).
- 2. But what I failed to understand is which calling of God is under consideration in Rom 11:29.
 - A. There are two callings in the Bible (four if you count the resurrection and the ministry).
 - i. There is a call of repentance that God has issued to all mankind (**Act 17:30**).
 - a. This is a call to repent, believe the gospel, and get baptized (**Mar 1:15; Act 2:38**).
 - b. The call of repentance is the call to repent of sins which means to feel sorry for them and change our mind and direction in life

concerning them (**Act 8:22; Act 26:18; 1Ki 8:47; Jer 8:6; Eze 18:30**).

- (i) **Repent** *v.* - 1. *refl.* To affect (oneself) with contrition or regret for something done, etc. (cf. 3.) 3. *intr.* To feel contrition, compunction, sorrow or regret for something one has done or left undone; to change one's mind with regard to past action or conduct through dissatisfaction with it or its results.
- (ii) Jesus came to call *sinners* to repentance (**Luk 5:32**).
- (iii) What do *sinners* repent of? *Sin*, of course.
- c. To obey the gospel we must repent of all sin, not just unbelief.
 - (i) This is the repentance that John the Baptist required of his converts (**Luk 3:7-9**).
 - (ii) Repentance includes turning from sins such as selfishness and covetousness, and instead helping others (**Luk 3:10-11**).
 - (iii) Repentance includes turning from sins such as theft and fraud (**Luk 3:12-13**).
 - (iv) Repentance includes turning from sins such as violence, lying, deceit, and covetousness, and instead being content with what one has (**Luk 3:14**).
 - (v) Repentance includes turning from *sins* such as uncleanness, fornication, and lasciviousness (**2Co 12:21**).
 - (vi) Unbelief is just one of the many sins that we are commanded to repent of (**Joh 16:9**).
- d. This call is universal.
- e. This call can also be resisted and disobeyed (**Luk 7:29-30; Mat 21:32**).
- ii. There is also an effectual call from spiritual death to spiritual life that is by the sovereign voice of Jesus Christ (**Joh 5:25**).
 - a. This is the call of regeneration which gives the elect eternal life (**Tit 3:5; Eph 2:1**).
 - b. This is the call which makes a man born again (**Joh 3:3**).
 - c. This call is irresistible because it is issued to the spiritually dead who have no more power to resist it than did Lazarus have the power to resist the call by the voice of Christ which raised him from the dead (**Joh 11:43-44 c/w Joh 12:17**).
- B. So which of these callings is being referred to in Rom 11:29?
 - i. The calling of God in Rom 11:29 was spoken of in connection with His election (**Rom 11:28**).
 - ii. God's elect are called "the called" (**Rom 8:28**).
 - iii. "The called" are foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified (**Rom 8:29-30**).
 - iv. Every single person that was foreknown by God and predestinated is *called*, and every single person that is *called* is justified by the blood of Christ and will be glorified at the resurrection.
 - v. Thus every single person who is *called* is one of the elect who will be saved eternally according to Rom 8:29-30.

- vi. Therefore, this calling of the elect is the effectual call of regeneration.
 - vii. This is the calling in Rom 11:29 which is without repentance because it is effectual to all of the elect, regardless of their acceptance or rejection of it.
3. Eternal salvation is not an *offer*, but rather a *gift*.
- A. Offer *n.* - 1. a. An act of offering (see offer v. 3, 4); a holding forth or presenting for acceptance; an expression of intention or willingness to give or do something conditionally on the assent of the person addressed; a proposal.
 - B. You will search the scriptures in vain to find a verse that says that eternal salvation is an offer from God to sinners.
 - C. Eternal life is a *gift* (**Rom 6:23; Rom 5:18**).
 - i. Gift *n.* - II. The thing given. 3. a. Something, the possession of which is transferred to another without the expectation or receipt of an equivalent; a donation, present.
 - ii. Unlike an offer, a gift does not have to be accepted.
 - a. If I give you a black eye you don't have to accept it to have it.
 - b. If I transferred ownership of property to you, you do not have to accept it to be the legal owner of it. In fact, if I didn't tell you that I had done so, you would be the legal owner of it without even knowing about it.
 - iii. Eternal life/salvation is likewise a gift that cannot be accepted or rejected because a sinner was dead when it was given to him, and dead people are pretty bad at refusing anything.
 - D. Jesus didn't offer Himself to us or offer to save us, He offered Himself to God for us in order to save us (**Eph 5:2; Heb 9:14**).

VIII. *His call is the offer that enables us to believe, but salvation is revocable if we fall away (Romans 11:19-21).*

- 1. *His call is the offer that enables us to believe,*
 - A. This statement makes no sense.
 - B. The call that I was thinking of was the gospel call to repent and believe on Christ.
 - C. I apparently thought that it was only issued to the elect and that somehow it enabled them to believe.
 - D. How could a call to believe something enable someone to believe something?
 - i. What if I called on all kindergarteners to believe in the theory of special relativity?
 - a. Could my telling them to believe it enable them to understand it?
 - b. Obviously not. I would have to somehow first give them a mature mind capable of understanding it before they could believe it.
 - ii. How could God telling the elect to believe the gospel enable them to understand it?
 - a. Given that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to the natural man (**1Co 1:18**), just calling on him to believe it will do nothing for him.
 - b. In order for the call to enable us to believe, it would have to be an effectual call that gave us a new spirit capable of understanding and believing it.

- c. But if it were the effectual call of regeneration then all of the elect would be saved regardless of their belief (which is the truth).
- iii. What about all of the other non-elect people that hear the same gospel call?
 - a. Are they enabled to believe it simply by hearing it?
 - b. If so, are they elect?
 - c. If not, why not?

2. *but salvation is revocable if we fall away (Romans 11:19-21).*

A. There are a couple of problems with this statement.

B. Firstly, it is false.

- i. Eternal salvation (which is what I was referring to) is not revocable.
- ii. It is called *eternal* salvation (**Heb 5:9**), *eternal* redemption (**Heb 9:12**), and *eternal* life (**1Jo 5:11**).
- iii. Eternal *adj.* - 1. a. Infinite in past and future duration; without beginning or end; that always has existed and always will exist: esp. of the Divine Being.
3. a. Infinite in future duration; that always will exist; everlasting, endless.
¶The New Testament expressions eternal life, death, punishment, etc. are here referred to sense 3, this being the sense in which the adj. in such contexts is ordinarily taken.
- iv. Eternal life cannot be lost or revoked (**Joh 10:28-29**).

C. Secondly, Rom 11:19-21 is not referring to eternal salvation.

- i. The branches being broken off the olive tree in this passage refers to the Jews losing their place in the church which was originally theirs.
- ii. The olive tree is the church which belonged to the Jews for 1,500 years.
- iii. When Jesus came, He came unto His own (the Jews) and they received Him not (**Joh 1:11**).
- iv. The gospel later went to the Gentiles, and when they believed it they were spiritually made citizens of the commonwealth of Israel (**Eph 2:12 c/w 19**).
- v. They were the wild branches that were grafted into the olive tree which was the NT church (**Rom 11:24**).
- vi. The Jews lost their place in the church because of their unbelief, but those of them who were of the elect didn't lose their eternal salvation (**Rom 11:25-29**).