

It's a question as old as Christianity. It comes up time and again throughout history. Even today, in even catechism class that's taught, at some point one of the students will ask, "Why some and not others?" Why does God save some but not all? Why are some not saved? God says he chose you. Did he then choose not to save others? Over and over these kinds of questions have been asked throughout history. It is a struggle for the human mind to grasp God's plan and teachings on this. And so throughout history many have come up with various ways of answering this question for themselves. Most of them are wrong.

John Calvin let his logic and reason run away from him. Reason is a fine thing that God gave us, but it is corrupted by sin and under no circumstance should it be allowed to overrun God's word. If God's word seems to contradict our reason, it should be pretty obvious which one is wrong. But Calvin thought, if some are chosen to be saved, then other must be chosen to not be saved. And so the God who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, must not really mean that. He must have decided that some people will not be saved. And so when you are born your fate is already decided and all you can do with your life is be as good and faithful as you can to prove to yourself that you are one of the chosen! How oppressive! How utterly lacking in the comfort that God intends!

On the other side of the coin, there are those who see in scripture the truth that it is our fault we sin. It is our choice to reject God. And so if that is true, then it must be equally true that it is also our choice when we follow God, when we serve God, when we believe in God. And so the burden is laid at our feet to believe enough, work enough, prove ourselves worthy enough to receive God's love. Again, where is the comfort? Where is the joy? This logic may "answer" the question, but it destroys hope in the process.

Neither of these ideas or any other ideas that have come up answer the question properly. None of them keep all of God's word in mind. And neither provide any actual comfort or hope for us even if they were true. The truth of what God did for us answers the question. And the truth of what God did gives us perfect comfort and perfect hope. And it all centers around one perfect act of love. <Read text: John 3:14-21>.

In a very real way, the question itself is flawed. For one, it's really not even a question to ask. That sounds a little harsh maybe but the point is valid. You see, the whole point of everything God teaches us, the whole point of scripture itself isn't to pry into the dark corners and try to find little bits for our human curiosity to nibble on. Oh sure, you may find some bits confusing, you may even find things that seem contradictory. You could even dig in and reason it out and say "A-ha!" like you caught God in a contradiction or even a lie. But do you really think your broken human wisdom has a chance against God? That kind of pursuit is a waste of time. It is an abuse of God's word.

The point of what God has given us is to point us straight to the one who was lifted up in the air like the snake in the desert. The point of scripture is to show us how God loved us so much that he gave his Son for us. Every path through scripture leads up the hill to the cross and on to the empty tomb. This is what we are to see here, this is what we are to focus on, rejoice in and take in every day of our lives. Everything we learn about God and everything we do in our lives should be filtered through this perspective, the view of a God who loved us so much he died for us. This single-minded appreciation of what God has done for you at the cross is exactly the kind of child-like faith that Jesus applauds and tells us we must have.

It is there, on the cross, that we see the singular, perfect act of love. Again, our limited human minds struggle to comprehend it. To us, love is a reaction. Love is something we feel as a result of something else. We care when we are given a reason to. To get technical, our love has its origin in the object of our affection. But not God's love. God's love operates the way love is supposed to operate. God's love begins in the giver. God loves because he chooses to, not because we give him a reason to. Which is very good, because we never give him a reason to.

Not that we think that way by nature. No, our natural instinct is to have a pretty high opinion of ourselves. That's where so many false thoughts digging into God's wisdom run off the rails, you see. We think too much of ourselves and our abilities. It is a slap in the face, a wake-up call that we struggle to accept to hear that God hates everything about how you choose to live, everything about your words and your actions. You should be living in light, you should be walking with him every step of every day, holding God above everything in your life, and showing equal care to all those around you. We like to think we're good people, but it's that very self-centered notion that condemns us. You are an abomination, the opposite of everything God calls good and holy. By nature you are disgusting and detestable in his sight.

I don't say this to depress you or rile you up or anything like that. But it is essential to understand and accept our default relationship with our God in order to truly appreciate that despite what we are, God chose to love us anyway.

Until we understand exactly how much reason he had NOT to do what he did, we won't know how loving it was that he still did it. This is how we know what perfect love is. True love is completely selfless. True love is willing to give everything for the benefit of that which we love. True love exists because we choose to have it, not because we are given a reason. And that is exactly the kind of love that caused God to give his one and only Son that you not perish but have eternal life.

This is the focus. This is the reason we have God's word. This is the truth we come week after week to hear again and again, and that the believer never tires of hearing. That God loved you while you were unlovable. That God took your place when you deserved death. That God suffered the punishment for your crimes so you would not have to. That God rose from the dead to assure you that you are saved. And even now, that it is God who has brought you to know and trust that these things are true. And that by this God-given faith, we receive what Jesus has done for us. God sent his son to save the world through him, that whoever believes in him is not condemned.

It is all God. It is all by him, it is all to his credit, all to his glory. This runs contrary to our nature, our nature that wants to believe God likes us because of something about us, that in some small way we deserve this rescue, or that in some small way we can contribute to this rescue. But the Apostle Paul, in our reading to the Ephesians today makes it very clear that is not the case. It's as though he anticipates our natural objections and counters every one of them as he wrote, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."** (Eph 2:8,9).

There is the simple answer to the first half of that age-old question. Why are some saved? They are saved entirely by the grace of God. It was God's grace, his mercy, his love in perfect action that caused him to live for you, die for you and bring you to faith in him. You are saved, because God alone has saved you without your effort or cooperation.

Of course, we are left with the other lingering thread of that thought. Why are some not saved? Jesus makes that very plain right here when he says, **"...whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."** (v18-20). Those without faith are condemned. And who is to blame for that? It is the one without faith. The deeds that condemn them are their own. Their rejection of Jesus' gift is their own. God died for them, same as you. God offered them faith same as you. But they refused to step into the light because they loved the darkness. They were afraid of what would be seen in the light. So they stayed in the dark. This was their own choice, and their own fault. Those who stand condemned before God are there because they have brought it on themselves.

Of course, this idea that we must step into the light may worry even us. We certainly have every right to be afraid of our deeds being exposed. But note carefully what Jesus says at the end here, **"But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** (v21). By faith we stand in the light not showing what we have done, but what has been done through God. The believer who stands in the light does not show what they have done, what we should be ashamed of. Rather we show what God has done for us. We show the perfect life that Jesus lived in our place and gave to us from the cross. By faith when we stand in the light God sees what he has done for us.

And so we come to an apparently contradictory conclusion to our inquiry, and yet it is exactly what God tells us and exactly the way it needs to be in order to fulfill both God's love and justice. If we are saved, it is 100% by God's work and effort in us, with us adding or contributing nothing, and entirely to God's glory. If we are condemned, it is entirely by our own action, entirely our own fault. It defies our reason but it cannot be any other way.

If our condemnation was a choice that God made, not us, there could be no true hope, we would always despair that we might be one of those God chose for damnation. And it would utterly destroy the essential attribute of God's love. If, on the other hand, our salvation depends on us in the slightest, if we had to merit it in the smallest way, if we had to work even a tenth of a percent to make it complete, we would likewise be robbed entirely of any comfort, never being sure that we had done it well or right.

It is our God, from beginning to end who has saved you, and it simply has to be that way. In this perfect act, perfect expression of love, he has given you eternal life, entirely because he has chosen to. That is the focus of our lives as Christians, that is our eternal sure hope. Let the rest of the questions fall by the wayside, look to the cross with the complete child-like assurance that because God loves you, because he gave himself for you, you will live, no questions asked. Amen.