

Grace Changes Everything

Part 4 – Unconditional Election

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 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 to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:3-6).

“So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Romans 9:16-18).

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19)

“We will never be saved unless God chooses to save us. Election leads to the saving action of God in his lordship, and if we were left to ourselves we would never respond to God on our own at all.” – J.I. Packer



Because humanity outside of Christ is dead in trespasses and sins and unable to understand and unwilling to accept the things of the Spirit then the salvation of sinners is left entirely in God’s sovereign hands. Far from fate (which is understood as some impersonal force) God’s sovereign election of his people is his free and purposeful act fully encompassing his goodness, wisdom, justice, and love.

The Biblical Doctrine of Election Summarized

“The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam’s race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save. God could have chosen to save all men (for he had the power and authority to do so) or He could have chosen to save none (for He is under no obligation to show mercy to any) – but He did neither. Instead, He chose to save some and to exclude others. His eternal choice of particular sinners for salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will. Thus, election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do, but resulted entirely from God’s self-determined purpose.”¹

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, Of God’s Eternal Decree:

V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

VI. As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

¹ Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1963, 2004) p. 27

VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, as He pleases, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praised of His glorious justice.

VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.

The Baptist Faith and Message, V. God's Purpose of Grace:

"Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility."

The Biblical Language:

1. The verb to "choose" or to "elect" (*eklego*) is found twenty-two times in the New Testament. It is used eight times of Christ's choosing or electing his disciples (Luke 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16 (twice), 19; Acts 1:2; 2:4). On one occasion Jesus is himself the person chosen (Luke 9:35). Six times it is used in a context that does not pertain to salvation (Luke 10:42; 14:7; Acts 6:5; 15:7,22,25). The remaining seven occurrences refer to men and women as the objects of election to eternal life (Mark 13:20; Acts 13:17; 1 Corinthians 1:27 (twice), 28; Ephesians 1:4; James 2:5).

2. The noun "elect" (*eklektos*) is also used twenty-two times in the New Testament. On three occasions Jesus is the "elect" one (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 2:4,6), and in one text the word refers to angels (1 Timothy 5:21). There is also one passage in which the word has no bearing on salvation (Romans 16:13). In the seventeen remaining cases the word is used of men and women as God's "elect," those chosen to eternal life (Matthew 22:14; 24:22,24,31; Mark 13:20,22,27; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9; 2 John 1,13; Revelation 17:14).

3. The word which means "election" (*ekloge*) is used seven times, all of which refer to salvation (Acts 9:15; Romans 9:11; 11:5,7,28; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10).

4. The word frequently translated "to predestine" or "to predestinate" (*proorizo*) is found six times in the New Testament. It is used once with reference to Christ's sufferings (Acts 4:28), once of the predestination of God's redemptive plan (1 Corinthians 2:7), and four times of the predestination of people to salvation (Romans 8:29,30; Ephesians 1:5,11).

If we take the Scriptures seriously then the question is not whether we believe in election but rather what we believe is the basis upon which God elects his people. Is God's election of his people conditioned upon something they do or is his election sovereign and according his own purposes?

- **Conditional Election** – God chooses his people based upon their choosing Him. This is the classic Arminian understanding of election. The condition upon which God elects his people is their freely chosen faith in Christ.
- **Unconditional Election** – "The biblical doctrine of election is that before Creation God selected out of the human race, foreseen as fallen, those whom he would redeem, bring to faith, justify, and glorify in and through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9-10). This divine choice is an expression of free and sovereign grace, for it is unconstrained and unconditional, not merited by anything in those who are its subjects." (from Concise Theology by J.I. Packer)

A Chosen People

- **Deuteronomy 10:14-15** – "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day."

- **Psalm 33:12** – “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!”
- **Psalm 65:4** – “Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!”
- **Matthew 11:27** – “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”
- **Matthew 22:14** – “For many are called, but few are chosen.”
- **Matthew 24:22, 24, 31** – “And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of *the elect* those days will be cut short...For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even *the elect*...And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather *his elect* from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”
- **Luke 18:7** – “And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”
- **Romans 8:28-30** – And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are *called according to his purpose*. For those whom he *foreknew* he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he *predestined* he also called, and those whom he *called* he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”
- **Romans 8:33** – “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect.”
- **Romans Chapter 9**
- **1 Peter 2:8-9** – “...They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Various Supporting Texts from the New Testament:

- **John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 24** – The elect are the Father’s gift to the Son.
- **John 6:37-40; 10:14-16, 26-29; 15:16; 17:6-26; Ephesians 5:25-27** – Jesus testifies that he came into the world to save those whom the Father gave him.
- **Ephesians 1:1-14** – Paul explains our being “in Christ” is due to our having been chosen by God before the foundations of the world. God “works all things” (including the salvation of his people) in accordance to the council of His own will.
- **Romans 8:28-30** – God’s foreknowledge in this context is not merely his foreknowledge of facts. Rather Paul is referencing God’s foreknowledge of persons. God “foreknew” His elect. That is, before the foundation of the world, God knew his own by name.
- **Romans 9** – Paul explains to Jewish Christians why so many Jews have rejected the Messiah. In so doing he explains that salvation from start to finish is wholly a work of God’s sovereign grace.
- **John 6:35-40, 44** – Jesus locates the reality of our coming to Him entirely in the sovereign will of God.
- **Acts 14:48** – All those appointed unto eternal life will believe.
- **1 Peter 2:9** – “For you are a chosen people...”
- **2 Peter 1:10** – “...be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure.”
- **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5** – “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13** – “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.
- **2 Timothy 1:8-9** – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Election is God's free act not based upon anything outside himself

The Arminian understanding of election is that God chooses individuals on the basis of his prior knowledge that they will choose him. But such an understanding nullifies not only the doctrine taught in Scripture but the very grammar God's Word employs in words like "elect," "election," "call," "chose," and "predestined."

- Election is based upon God's choosing – Mark 13:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13
- God's election of his people occurred before creation – Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8; 17:8
- God chose particular individuals, not merely a plan – Revelation 13:8; 17:8
- God's choice is not based upon anything done or foreseen in the elect – Romans 9:11-13, 16; 10:20; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29; 2 Timothy 1:9
- Election is not based upon foreseen faith – Acts 13:48; Acts 18:27; Philippians 1:29; Philippians 2:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

Is Unconditional Election Unjust?

- Perhaps the most frequent objection to the doctrine of unconditional election is that it impugns God's justice; it's not fair. God is not being fair unless he treats everyone the same; unless he gives everyone the same mercy. But this betrays a twisted understanding of justice. Justice means that we are given our due. To withhold from someone what they deserve or what the law demands is to act unjustly. It is not therefore unjust or unfair to withhold from someone what they do *not* deserve.
- God is never in humanity's debt. He is obligated to save no one. He owes no one his mercy. As a result, God is not obligated to show mercy to all for showing mercy to some.
- **Romans 9:14-18** – "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills."
- "If God had not graciously chosen a people for Himself and sovereignly determined to provide salvation for them and apply it to them, none would be saved. The fact that He did this for some, to the exclusion of others, is in no way unfair to the later group, unless of course one maintains that God was under obligation to provide salvation for sinners – a position which the Bible utterly rejects."²
- "The marvel of marvels," says Benjamin Warfield, "is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. What really needs accounting for...is how the holy God could get the consent of his nature to save a single sinner. If we know what sin is, and what holiness is, and what salvation from sin to holiness is, this is what we shall face."³



Does the Bible teach that God wills that all be saved?

John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world..."

- We have to understand that "world" in the Scriptures is a word which is sometimes used not statistically for the world in all its numbers, such as x billions of people, but for the world in its moral quality, that is, the world in all its badness. When it says that Christ is the Savior of the world, part of the thought at any rate is that Christ saves men out of every race and kindred and tribe and tongue in all their badness and rebellion against God.

² Steele, Thomas and Quinn, p. 28

³ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Election," in *Selected Shorter Writings*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1970), I:297-98

1 Timothy 2:3-4 – “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

- The scope of the word “all” has to be determined by the context in which it is used. In some texts the word “all” is inclusive of everyone and everything without exception (Acts 10:38; Eph 1:11; Col 1:17, 20). In other cases the word “all” refers to all things within a restricted sphere – all of a specified sort (Rom 14:2; I Cor 1:5; 6:12; 10:23; Phil 4:13). In still other contexts the word “all” refers to all kinds or all sorts, that is to say *without distinction* (Matt 9:35; 10:1; Luke 11:42; Acts 10:12; I Tim 6:10; and I Tim 2:4).
- If God purposed and attempted to save the entire population of humanity then that is what would happen. God did not leave the success of His supreme act of grace up to the sinful wills and whims of man. The cross work of Christ has a universal scope in the sense that it is offered to humanity from every nation and people without distinction (“all”). God has determined to save men and women from every nation, language, and tribe. His promise to do so begs the question: How can God promise that believers will come from every corner of the earth if He has not decreed it to be so? Is the ground of this promise God’s sovereign and gracious purpose or man’s own choosing?

2 Peter 3:9 – “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

- What does the context demand of the word “all” in this passage? Peter is making the point to his original readers that the Lord delays His return not from negligent inattentiveness but out of longsuffering toward His people. He is not willing that any of them should perish. It is the Father’s will to lose none of those whom He has given to the Son (John 6:39).
- Peter is writing to those he refers to as “the elect.” He is not writing to a general audience. Nor is he writing to everyone in the entire world. Throughout his two epistles Peter has a specific audience in mind and this through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Do we not do the same thing? When we enter our home, classroom, or office we do not ask “Is everyone here?” or “Are we all here?” anticipating to find over 6 ½ billion people present? Of course not. Rather we are addressing those who are supposed to be there.
- Context is king! Peter tells us who he is addressing, and it is not all of humanity: “...but is patient toward *you*, not wishing that *any* should perish...” “You” and “any” are referring to the same group – the elect to whom Peter is writing.

Conditional Election...

1. Undermines the doctrine of the Trinity

What the Father decrees, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies.

The creation account in Genesis chapter one testifies to this as the Father decrees, the Word accomplishes, and the Spirit brings proper order. This same Trinitarian union is seen in God’s gracious salvation of his people. The Father decreed the salvation of his people before the foundation of the world. The Son accomplished the salvation of the elect in his death and resurrection. And the Spirit applies this work of redemption through effectual calling and regeneration.

2. Undermines the doctrine of God’s sovereignty.

Conditional election makes God contingent upon the independent choices of fallen humanity. It leaves God’s entire redemptive plan in the hands of unregenerate man. Such a view makes mankind – even unregenerate mankind – sovereign over God.

3. Undermines the doctrine of total depravity.

Conditional election requires that unregenerate individuals, contrary to Scripture, have within them the capacity to understand and respond obediently to the law of God.

4. Undermines God’s glory in salvation.

Conditional election cannot avoid the conclusion that man is at least partially responsible for his own salvation. Not only that, it leads to the inevitable conclusion that mankind makes Christ’s death effectual through the free exercise of his faith. Such ideas are not only grossly unbiblical but result in making a claim

to glory that belongs to God. The Scriptures teach that God saves us “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:11-14).

“To the praise of his glorious grace”

- God would have been perfectly justified in leaving all humanity to our sins and rebellion. In so doing His justice would have been magnified. God owes salvation to no one. But God desires to bring glory to Himself by magnifying His grace as well.
- To that end, from all eternity God has chosen to graciously save for Himself a people. That means there are many millions of sinners to whom God showed mercy and saved out of their rebellion and sin.
- Each stanza in the opening paragraph of Ephesians 1 concludes with the phrase, “to the praise of His glorious grace” (vv. 6, 12, 14). Apart from God’s intervening grace we all like sheep would go astray. We would all turn away. We would all distort and suppress the truth. But God seeks to magnify His grace by mercifully triumphing over the stubborn sinful wills of many millions of sinners. What amazing grace!