

Election & Predestination

“What We Believe”

3/2/16, Pastor Kevin Sauder, ksauder@mynCBC.org

Preliminary Clarifications

Excerpted from “Sovereign Grace and the Glorious Mystery of Election” by C.J. Mahaney, March 2004.

Before exploring the marvelous doctrine of election, the following points must be made in an effort to minimize any potential misunderstanding.

- 1) Because we find both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in Scripture, we must teach both, all the while emphasizing that the accent in Scripture is on election: the sovereignty of God in salvation.
- 2) The doctrine of election, although vitally important, does not define Sovereign Grace Ministries [or New Castle Bible Church]. The gospel defines us.

Election plays a critical role in relation to the gospel of grace. It protects and preserves the gospel, but it is not fully synonymous with the gospel. The gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ. We are saved by trusting in him and his perfect work. “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1Co 15:3-4). We are not more passionate about election than we are about the gospel. Election is a vital doctrine, but only the gospel is of first importance.

- 3) A person does not have to believe in, understand, or agree with the doctrine of election in order to be saved. A saving relationship with God requires repentance from sin and trust in Christ alone, to save by grace alone, through faith alone. While the doctrine of election is an important one, and mistaken beliefs about it can have negative consequences, an embrace of the doctrine of election is clearly not necessary to salvation.
- 4) The doctrine of election is for Christians, not non-Christians. It should not be taught or referred to in any evangelistic context. Theologian Bruce Milne has stated wisely that the doctrine of election “is not an explicit part of the gospel which the Christian presents to the unbeliever. It ought not to inhibit the universal appeal of Christian evangelism.” [Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, (Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 1982), p. 183.] The English reformer John Bradford said, “Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance before he goes to the university of election and predestination.”
- 5) Our unity with Christians from outside this ministry does not require full agreement on the doctrine of election. We affirm these words of Charles Spurgeon:

"We give our hand to every man that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, be he what he may or who he may. The doctrine of election, like the great act of election itself, is not intended to divide between Israel and Israel but between Israel and the Egyptians. Not between saint and saint, but between saints and the children of the world. A man may be evidently of God's chosen family and yet, though elected, may not believe in the doctrine of election. I hold that there are many savingly called who do not believe in effectual calling and that there are a great many who persevere to the end who do not believe the doctrine of final perseverance. We do hope the hearts of many are a great deal better than their heads. We do not set their fallacies down to any willful opposition to the truth as it is in Jesus, but simply to an error in their judgment which we pray God to correct. We hope that if they think us mistaken, too, they will reciprocate the same Christian courtesy. And when we meet around the cross, we hope that we shall ever feel that we are one in Christ Jesus."

The Doctrine of Election

Pastor Art Georges' notes excerpted from The Gospel Institute – learn more at www.peoriagospelinstitute.org.

"God stands at the door of heaven with His arms outstretched, inviting all to come. Yet all men without exception are running in the opposite direction towards hell as hard as they can go. So God, in election, graciously reaches out and stops this one, and that one, and this one over here, and that one over there, and effectually draws them to Himself by changing their hearts, making them willing to come. **Election keeps no one out of heaven who would otherwise have been there, but it keeps a whole multitude of sinners out of hell who otherwise would have been there. Were it not for election, heaven would be an empty place, and hell would be bursting at the seams.** That kind of response, grounded as I believe that it is in Scriptural truth, does put a different complexion on things, doesn't it? If you perish in hell, blame yourself, as it is entirely your fault. But if you should make it to heaven, credit God, for that is entirely His work! To Him alone belong all praise and glory, for salvation is all of grace, from start to finish." - Mark Webb, <http://www.fundamentallyreformed.com/2006/02/05/the-goodness-of-god-in-election/>, Accessed on 3/2/16

A. Definitions:

1. **Election:** God chose or selected in eternity those who are to be saved.

"an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure." (Grudem, 670)

"The verb 'elect' means to select, or choose out. The biblical doctrine of election is that before the 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. 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. God owes sinners no mercy of any kind, only condemnation; so it is a wonder, and matter of endless praise, that he should choose to save any of us; and doubly so, when his choice involved the giving of his own Son to suffer as sin-bearer for the elect." – J.I. Packer

2. **Predestination:** God predetermined or appointed individuals beforehand to a specific destiny.

Romans 8:29 *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.*

Ephesians 1:4-5, 11 *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ... 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,*

3. **Foreknowledge:** God chose beforehand or foreordained that a particular action would occur.

Romans 8:28-29 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ 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.*

1 Peter 1:1-2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

Foreknowledge is not the equivalent of merely seeing or having knowledge of an action before it actually occurs. Foreknowledge is actively causing something to happen—it is an action, not knowledge.

4. **Called:** God chose someone for salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 *but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

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. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ 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 9:22-26 *What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” ²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ”*

Such a calling is effectual—it always results in salvation.

B. The New Testament Support for this Doctrine

John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

Acts 13:48 *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*

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 9:10-16 *And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad — in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls — she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ([Gen 25:23](#)) As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ([Mal 1:2-3](#)) 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." ([Ex 33:19](#)) So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

C.f. James White: Exegesis of Romans 9 - <http://mp3.aomin.org/JRW/Romans9.mp3> audio, ~ 49 min, extremely thorough and well done explanation of the passage

Romans 11:5-7 *So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened*

Ephesians 1:4-5 *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 through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*

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 firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*

1 Peter 1:1-2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

C. The Application of Believing in God's Sovereign Grace of Election

1. It brings hope and comfort to the afflicted.

Romans 8:28-29 *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ 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.*

1 Thess 5:24 *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

2. It brings joy in our worship.

Ps 118:21-24 *I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. ²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. ²³ This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Ephesians 1:12 *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.*

Humbling the pride of man and magnifying the pure grace of God. If I am ignorant of God's work and power, how can I truly worship Him? A child of God will grow in humility as he/she realizes that salvation is beyond his/her own powers, efforts, will, and works. The greater the understanding of God's power and majesty, the greater the impetus to worship.

3. It removes boasting and pride.

1 Corinthians 4:7 *For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

Romans 9:16 *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*

4. It encourages us toward evangelism

2 Timothy 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

5. It empowers our perseverance and assurance of salvation.

Jude 24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

D. The unconditional nature of election: We choose God because He first chose us

1. It is not based on God looking into the future to see ahead of time who will believe. I.e. God's election is merely "foresight" (see Grudem, 676-679)

This contradicts the scriptures about man's depravity and sinful posture against God and His grace:

Ps 14:2-3 *The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.*

Rom 3:10-12 *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."*

1 Cor 2:14 *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

When the New Testament uses the term "foreknowledge" is always references God's knowledge of persons, not events or responses (cf. [Romans 8:28](#), [11:2](#); [1 Peter 1:20](#))

R.C. Sproul: Video explaining how the foreknowledge view does not work (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zArjHbikAHU>)

"The Arminian cannot consistently hold to the foreknowledge of God and yet deny the doctrines of election and predestination. The question persists: Why does God create those who He knows will go to hell? It would be mere foolishness for Him to wish to save or try to save those who He knows will be lost. That would be for Him to work at cross purposes with Himself. Even a man has better sense than to try to do what he knows he will not do or cannot do. The Arminian has no alternative but to deny the foreknowledge of God — and then he has only a limited, ignorant, finite God who in reality is not God at all in the true sense of that word. **If election is based on foreknowledge, that makes it so meaningless that it becomes more confusing than enlightening. For even as regards the elect, what sense is there for God to elect those who He knows are going to elect themselves? That would be just plain nonsense.**"

– Lorraine Boettner, [God's Foreknowledge](#)

2. It is based on His good pleasure.

Ephesians 1:5 *he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*

3. It occurred in eternity past.

Ephesians 1:4 *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love*

2 Timothy 1:9 *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,*

“The Word of God is clear: believers are those whom God chose for salvation from before the beginning.” – John MacArthur, What is the Doctrine of Election? - <http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/9692>

E. Common Objections to the Doctrine of Election

John 6:65-66 *And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.*

Extensive resources on objections to election - <https://www.monergism.com/topics/election/objections-election-answered>

1. Election removes voluntary choice in the acceptance of Jesus as Savior.

But the Scriptures clearly teach personal responsibility – that man has a choice on whether or not to believe.

Isaiah 55:1 *Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

Matt 11:28-30 *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Acts 2:21 *And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’*

Romans 10:13 *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

Revelation 22:17 *The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*

The question, therefore, has never been “Does man have a voluntary choice in the matter of salvation?” Everyone agrees he certainly does. The real question, rather, is *how* man is able to make the *correct choice* to come to Christ.

Also see previous lesson on the nature of man and the effects of sin.

So the truth of Scripture is this: Any can come and not be cast out; but all who come have been chosen by God.

John 1:12-13 *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

John 3:27 *John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.*

John 6:37 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

John 6:44 *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*

Acts 13:48 *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*

2. Election is not fair — Election leads to fatalism and determinism.

But what is divine justice? “Simply stated, it is an essential attribute of God whereby He infinitely, perfectly, and independently does exactly what He wants to do when and how He wants to do it. Because He is the standard of justice, by very definition, whatever He does is inherently just. As William Perkins said, many years ago, ‘We must not think that God doeth a thing because it is good and right, but rather is the thing good and right because God willeth it and worketh it.’ Therefore, God defines for us what justice is, because He is by nature just and righteous, and what He does reflects that nature. His free will – and nothing else – is behind His justice. This means that whatever He wills is just; and it is just, not because of any external standard of justice, but simply because He wills it. ... To say that election is unfair is not only inaccurate, it fails to recognize the very essence of true fairness. That which is fair, right, and just is that which God wills to do.” John MacArthur, in the foreword to *A Long Line of Godly Men*, by Steven Lawson.

And God IS love. He cannot do anything that would violate His essential character and nature. God elects based on his love.

Ephesians 1:4-5 *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 through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*

To suggest that everything that happens in life is in some sense planned by God immediately makes some feel that we're talking about fatalism. But fatalism is cruel and impersonal. God is certainly not either of those things. But the opposite side to this would say that nothing is planned by God. ... I don't know of a more unbiblical statement than that one. To say that all the evil things that take place on this planet happen without any purpose to them at all ... is that a better position than saying that they happen for a purpose — that God will work out His purposes in spite of the evil taking place? I don't think so. God is personal and His plans are personal.

Without doubt, the most evil action of sinners in recorded history was the crucifixion of the Son of God. There is no doubt this was unspeakably evil. But we have the record of the Early Church praying, in [Acts 4:27-28](#), *"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur."*

Acts 2:23 *this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

Thus, "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 — though to account for it passes the powers of our extremest flights of imagination — 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"

John Samson: Is Divine Election Fair? -

http://www.reformationtheology.com/2005/12/is_divine_election_fair_by_pas.php

3. Election makes us puppets rather than persons and contradicts the call for "whosoever will" may come. If God elected some then I don't need to witness.

But it is God's will to use His people (means) to accomplish His plan to save others.

Matt 28:18-20 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Romans 10:14-15 *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”*

Without election the invitation to “WHOSOEVER WILL” would go unheeded. The Bible doctrine of “WHOSOEVER WILL” does not imply the freedom or ability of the human will to do good. The human will is free, but its freedom is within the limits of fallen human nature. It is free like water; water is free to run down hill. It is free like the vulture; the vulture is free to eat carrion, for that is its nature, but it would starve to death in a wheat field. It is not the buzzard’s nature to eat clean food; it feeds upon the carcasses of the dead. So sinners starve to death in the presence of the bread of life. Our Lord said to some sinners, who were in His very presence “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life” ([John 5:40](#)).

Ah, the real trouble with the objector is not election; it is something else. His real objection is to total depravity or human inability to do good. I can do no better here than to quote from Percy W. Heward of London, England. He says, “It seems to me that the majority of objections to God’s sovereign grace, to God’s electing love, are actually objections to something else, namely objections to the fact that man is ruined. If you probe beneath the surface you will find that very few object to election. Why should they? Election harms no one. How can the picking of a man out of doom harm anyone else? The real objection at the present day is not to election, though that word is made the catchword of sad controversy — the real objection is to that fact which is revealed in [Psalm 51](#), that we are shaped in iniquity, that we are born sinners by nature, dead in sins. John Hendryx: Does God’s Sovereign Election of His People Make Us Mere Puppets on a String? - <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/puppets.html>

We don’t know who will choose God or who will not. Our responsibility is to obediently present the Gospel to all men.

4. Election means that unbelievers do not have a chance to believe, and God is responsible for their being lost.

Predestination is not compulsion. Man makes his own decisions without being coerced. Predestination means to render certain; does not imply coercion.

Man is always responsible for his sin and lost-ness.

Rom 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Galatians 5:19-21 *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

“Election does not prevent the salvation of anybody who wants to be saved. But the distinction needs to be made between a mere desire to escape hell and the desire to be saved from sin. The

desire to be saved from hell is a natural desire — nobody wants to burn. The desire to be saved from sin is a spiritual desire resulting from the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, and God's electing grace is the very mother of this desire. To represent election by saying that God has spread the Gospel feast, and a man comes to the table hungering for the bread of life; but God says, 'No, this is not for you, you are not one of my elect,' is to misrepresent the Holy Doctrine. Here is the truth — God has spread the feast but the fact is nobody wants to come to the table." — C.D. Cole, The Doctrine of Election - <http://brandplucked.webs.com/electinggrace.htm>

5. "I can't accept truth if I can't understand it." However, most things about God we cannot understand.

Infinite minds can never understand and infinite God.

"Because we tend to approach the Scripture with preconceived ideas derived from our humanness and our philosophical bent, we need to challenge our thinking with that which is taught by the Word of God. From the start, we must realize that there are things that our finite minds have difficulty in comprehending. We may never, while on earth, be able to fully comprehend all that is involved in the doctrine of divine election." Dr. William Barrick

Psalms 50:21 *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

Psalms 139:6 *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.*

Isaiah 55:8-10 *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:*

Romans 11:33 *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

Recommended Resources

- Extensive resources on election - <https://www.monergism.com/topics/election>
- R.C. Sproul: [Chosen By God](#) (free lecture series, also [available in audio](#) and [as a book](#))
http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/chosen_by_god/