

The Doctrine of Election—how does it fit in with the Great Debate?

- **Terms...**

- Foreordain: All God's decisions played out in history
 - Predestine: Concerns salvation or condemnation
 - Election: Positive choice of those who get eternal life
 - Reprobation: Passing over some to suffer condemnation

- **Election: Biblical Words**

Elect	Predestine	Choose	Foreknow	Appoint
Gk. <i>ekloge</i> : to call out or choose (Liddle-Scott); selection, choosing (BAGD)	Gk. <i>proorizo</i> : to decide upon beforehand, to predestine (BAGD)	Gk. <i>aireo</i> : to choose something for something (BAGD)	Gk. <i>prognosis</i> : to know beforehand, to purpose (USB); to choose beforehand (BAGD)	Gk. <i>tasso</i> : to assign, cause to be, command (Louw-Nida); to belong to, to be classed among those possessing (BAGD)
Matt. 24:22; Mk. 13:27; Rom. 8:33, 11:7 ; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10 ; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1	Rom. 8:29-30 ; Eph. 1:5, 11	2 Thes. 2:13	Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2	Acts 13:48

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- **Conditional Election**

God's election is based on his foreknowledge. God looks ahead to the future, sees who will make a free-will decision to place their faith in him, and then chooses to save them.

- God has sovereignty decided to choose only those who have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, for salvation and his eternal blessing.
- God has foreknown from eternity which individuals would believe in Christ.
- Among Arminians, there are two different views of election conditioned on faith:

1. Individual election: The classic view in which God individually chose each believer based upon His foreknowledge of each one's faith and so predestined each to eternal life.
 2. Corporate election: Election to salvation is primarily of the Church as a people and embraces individuals only in faith-union with Christ and as members of his people. Since the election of the individual comes from the election of Christ and the corporate people of God, individuals become elect when they believe... and remain elect only as long as they believe.
- God must give people a free choice in order to hold them responsible. His desire to save all is the priority. God's election is based on foreknowledge of their free will decision.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. John 3:18

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. 1 Peter 1:1–2

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

- **Arguments for Conditional Election**

- God desires all to be saved and does not desire the death of the wicked (Ezk 33:11)
- The universal character of God's commands and exhortations reveal his desire to save all people (John 3:3). Also, God issues a universal invitation for all to come to Christ (Mt 11:28). It depends on man's free response.
- All people are able to believe and be saved because God has given prevenient grace to counteract sin and render everyone able to respond to the gospel. There is no need for special grace from God for salvation.
- It would be unjust and unfair of God to hold people responsible for what they are unable to do.
- God does choose some to salvation and pass over others. This is because he has foreseen who will accept the offer of salvation. Foreknowledge is God's knowing beforehand who will receive salvation, closely tied to election (Rom 8:29).

- **Unconditional Election**

The belief that God predestined people before the beginning of time and elected them based on God's sovereign choice, not on anything in man or foreseen faith.

- Key Passages...

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

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:44

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. John 15:16

10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 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— 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Romans 9:10–13

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48

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

So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. Romans 9:16

- Election must be unconditional and individual, because man is totally depraved. If election were conditioned upon the choice of man, no one would ever be elect, since man does not have the inclination for ability to choose God on his own.
- The words predestine, choose, appoint, and foreknow are all in the active voice, which speaks of the actor (God) behind the action. Foreknow is more than just prior knowledge, it is a love relationship (OT background). Election is to the praise of God's glorious grace, not to point out our faith.
- **Arguments for Unconditional Election**
 - The whole human race is lost in sin and is totally corrupted by sin. Therefore, man is unable to respond to God's offer of salvation because he is spiritually dead (Eph 2:1-3).
 - God is sovereign in all he does and can choose whomever he wills to save. He does this to show his grace, according to his good will and pleasure (Eph 1:5).

- God has chosen to save people not on the basis of their deeds or foreseen faith—but on the basis of his grace and for his glory (Eph 1:4-5).
- Election is an expression of God’s sovereign will and is the cause of faith (Eph 2:8-10).
- Election is effective for all of the elect. Those whom God chooses will certainly come to faith in Christ (Rom 8:29-30).
- Election is from all eternity and cannot be undone (Eph 1:4, 9-11).

What is the ultimate difference?

*In the final analysis, the difference between two views of election can be seen in the way they answer a very simple question. Given the fact that in the final analysis some people will choose to accept Christ and some people will not, the question is, “What makes people differ?” That is, **what ultimately makes the difference between those who believe and those who do not?** If our answer is that it is ultimately based on something God does (namely, his sovereign election of those who would be saved), then we see that salvation at its most foundational level is based on **grace alone**. On the other hand, if we answer that the ultimate difference between those who are saved and those who are not is because of **something in man** (that is, a tendency or disposition to believe or not believe), then salvation ultimately depends on a combination of grace plus human ability.*

Wayne Grudem

Reasons why I am convinced about unconditional election...

- **Man’s depravity, total inability to respond positively to God. All over the Scriptures!**

Rom 3:9-11, 18

John 3:19-21

Rom 14:23

Rom 1:18

Rom 7:18

Rom 8:5-9

Rom 6:17-18

Eph 2:1-5

Eph 4:17-18

1 Cor 2:14

Jer 17:9

1 Kgs 8:46

1 Jn 1:8

Ps 51:5

It is important to consider (the Bible’s) vivid picture of the lostness, blindness, and inability of humans in their natural state to respond in faith to the opportunity for salvation... it follows that no one would ever respond to the gospel call without some special action by God... there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for a concept of a universal enablement... God sincerely offers salvation to all, but all of us are so settled in our sins that we will not respond unless assisted to do so... If, as we have argued, humans in the unregenerate state are totally depraved and unable to respond to God’s grace, there is no question as to whether they are free to accept the offer of salvation—no one is! (Erickson)

If God were to leave it up to us, not a single person would ever want to be with God, and no one would ever desire to please God...God's choosing is never a matter of his turning away some who wanted to come. His choosing is always a matter of his bringing to him those who never would have come. (Ware)

- **God's foreknowledge is not just based on facts—the word *foreknow*.**

Some have argued that the verb *προέγνω* (*proegnō*, he foreknew) here should be defined only in terms of God's foreknowledge. That is, God predestined to salvation those whom he saw in advance would choose to be part of his redeemed community. This fits with Acts 26:5 and 2 Pet. 3:17, where the verb *προγινώσκειν* clearly means "to know beforehand." According to this understanding predestination is not ultimately based on God's decision to save some.

Instead, God has predestined to save those whom he foresaw would choose him. Such an interpretation is attractive in that it forestalls the impression that God arbitrarily saves some and not others.

The background of the term should be located in the OT, where for God "to know" (יָדָע, *yāda'*) refers to his covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen (cf. Gen. 18:19; Exod. 33:17; 1 Sam. 2:12; Ps. 18:43; Prov. 9:10; Jer. 1:5; Hos. 13:5; Amos 3:2). The parallel terms "consecrate" and "appoint" in Jer. 1:5 are noteworthy, for the text is not merely saying that God "foresaw" that Jeremiah would serve as a prophet. The point is that God had lovingly chosen him to be a prophet before he was born. Similarly, in Amos 3:2 God's knowledge of Israel in contrast to that of the rest of the nations can scarcely be cognitional, for Yahweh had full knowledge of all nations of the earth. The intention of the text is to say that Yahweh had set his covenantal love only upon Israel. Romans 11:2 yields the same conclusion, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." The verb *προέγνω* here functions as the antonym to *ἀπώσατο* (*apōsato*, he rejected). In other words, the verse is saying that God has not rejected his people upon whom he set his covenantal love (cf. also Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2, 20). Similarly, in Rom. 8:29 the point is that God has predestined those upon whom he has set his covenantal affection. (Schreiner, *Romans*)

If anyone comes to faith in Jesus, it is because they were quickened from the dead (Ephesians 2:5) by the creative Spirit of God. That is, they are effectually called from darkness into light. So the foreknowledge of Romans 8:29 is not the mere awareness of something that will happen in the future apart from God's predetermination. Rather it is the kind of knowledge referred to in Old Testament texts like Genesis 18:19 ("I have chosen [literally:known] Abraham so that he may charge his children...to keep the way of the Lord"), and Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations") and Amos 3:2 ("You only [Israel] have I known from all the families of the earth"). (Piper, TULIP)

- **The impressive amount of texts indicating God's selection of some based on His determination.**

Eph 1:3-6	1 Cor 1:26-30	James 2:5
Acts 13:48	John 6:37-39	John 10:24-27
John 6:44, 65	Romans 8:28-33	Romans 9:1-23
John 15:16		

- **The reasons of Eph 1; In love, To Praise His Grace, Riches of his Grace, Kind Intention of His Will, To Praise His Glory. Election is GOD CENTERED!!**

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **In love** ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will—** ⁶ **to the praise of his glorious grace**, which he has **freely given us** in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, **in accordance with the riches of God's grace** ⁸ that he **lavished** on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will **according to his good pleasure**, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, **might be for the praise of his glory.** ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

That choice in Christ was made in eternity, before time and creation, as the phrase before the creation of the world makes plain. The language of election before the foundation of the world occurs a number of times in the Pauline letters, not least in the context of thanksgiving (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:13; cf. Rom. 8:29; 2 Tim. 1:9), as part of an expression of gratitude for God's amazing grace. To say that election took place before creation indicates that God's choice was due to his own free decision and love, which were not dependent on temporal circumstances or human merit. The reasons for his election were rooted in the depths of his gracious, sovereign nature. To affirm this is to give to Christians the assurance that God's purposes for them are of the highest good, and the appropriate response from those who are chosen in Christ from all eternity is to praise him who has so richly blessed us (O'Brien, Pillar).

Regardless of which side you are on, remember that the NT teaches the doctrine of election...

(Grudem)

- **As a Comfort.**

But if God has always acted for our good and will in the future act for our good, Paul reasons, then will he not also in our present circumstances work every circumstance together for our good

as well? In this way predestination is seen as a comfort for believers in the everyday events of life.

- **As a Reason to Praise God.**

2 Thes 2:13, "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved." Paul was obligated to give thanks to God for the Christians at Thessalonica because he knew that their salvation was ultimately due to God's choice of them. Therefore it is appropriate for Paul to thank God for them rather than praising them for their own saving faith. Understood in this way, the doctrine of election does increase praise given to God for our salvation and seriously diminishes any pride that we might feel if we thought that our salvation was due to something good in us or something for which we should receive credit.

- **As an Encouragement to Evangelism.**

Paul says, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). He knows that God has chosen some people to be saved, and he sees this as an encouragement to preach the gospel, even if it means enduring great suffering. Election is Paul's guarantee that there will be some success for his evangelism, for he knows that some of the people he speaks to will be the elect, and they will believe the gospel and be saved. It is as if someone invited us to come fishing and said, "I guarantee that you will catch some fish—they are hungry and waiting." (Grudem)

What are some implications for life and ministry from the doctrine of Election?

Implications of Predestination

Correctly understood, the doctrine of predestination has several significant implications:

1. We can have confidence that what God has decided will come to pass. His plan will be fulfilled, and the elect will come to faith.
2. We need not criticize ourselves when some people reject Christ. Jesus himself did not win everyone in his audience. He understood that all those whom the Father gave to him would come to him (John 6:37) and only they would come (v. 44). When we have done our very best, we can leave the matter with the Lord.
3. Predestination does not nullify incentive for evangelism and missions. We do not know who the elect and the nonelect are, so we must continue to spread the Word. Our evangelistic efforts are God's means to bring the elect to salvation. God's ordaining of the end includes the ordaining of the means to that end as well. The knowledge that missions are God's means is a strong motive for the endeavor and gives us confidence that it will prove successful.

4. Grace is absolutely necessary. While Arminianism often gives strong emphasis to grace, in our Calvinistic scheme there is no basis for God's choice of some to eternal life other than his own sovereign will. There is nothing in the individual which persuades God to grant salvation.

F. Practical Application of the Doctrine of Election (Grudem)

The doctrine of election tells us that I am a Christian simply because God in eternity past decided to set his love on me. But why did he decide to set his love on me? Not for anything good in me, but simply because he decided to love me. There is no more ultimate reason than that.

It humbles us before God to think in this way. It makes us realize that we have no claim on God's grace whatsoever. Our salvation is totally due to grace alone. Our only appropriate response is to give God eternal praise.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that God chose you individually to be saved before he created the world? Do you think he did it on the basis of the fact that he knew you would believe in Christ, or was it "unconditional election," not based on anything that he foresaw in you that made you worthy of his love? No matter how you answered the previous question, explain how your answer makes you feel when you think about yourself in relationship to God.
2. Does the doctrine of election give you any comfort or assurance about your future?
3. After reading this chapter, do you honestly feel that you would like to give thanks or praise to God for choosing you to be saved? Do you sense any unfairness in the fact that God did not decide to save everyone?
4. If you agree with the doctrine of election as presented in this chapter, does it diminish your sense of individual personhood or make you feel somewhat like a robot or a puppet in God's hands? Do you think it should make you feel this way?
5. What effect do you think this chapter will have on your motivation for evangelism? Is this a positive or negative effect? Can you think of ways in which the doctrine of election can be used as a positive encouragement to evangelism (see 1 Thess. 1:4–5; 2 Tim. 2:10)?
6. Whether you adopt a Reformed or Arminian perspective on the question of election, can you think of some positive benefits in the Christian life that those who hold the *opposite* position from yours seem more frequently to experience than you do? Even though you do not agree with the other position, can you list some helpful concerns or practical truths about the Christian life that you might learn from that position? Is there anything that Calvinists and Arminians could do to bring about greater understanding and less division on this question?