

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #4, September 4 & 11, 2005

Unconditional Election

Huckleberry Finn, who disliked church and sermons, complained to Tom Sawyer “I got to go to church and sweat and sweat – I hate them ornery sermons. I can’t ketch a fly in there, I can’t chew. I got to wear shoes all Sunday.” But he really complained about one sermon over all others. “Two of the toughest hours I ever did spend was listening to a Presbyterian minister drone on about *pre-fore-destination*.”

I once met with a colorful local man who told me that he did not have any use for a certain local pastor, because “he teaches that *predetermination* mess and sends babies to hell.”

Then there is the joke about the Christian who never did know what he believed about this subject. He died and went to heaven, only to find two gates with lines. One was marked Calvinist and the other Arminian. He did not know which to choose, so he just picked the Calvinist line. Once he got to the front, he was asked why he was in that line. He responded that it was just the one he chose. So he was told that he was in the wrong line, and that he had to go to the Arminian line. Once he got to the front of it, he was asked why he was in that line. He responded that he was sent there. They said, “you’re in the wrong line!”

But in reality sermons or teachings on predestination or election are indeed rare. In fact, most people (including pastors) are afraid to even bring up these words that God uses in His word repeatedly. *Why?* It seems that most are afraid of the subject, many are mad about the subject (one way or the other), and a few are humbled by the subject.

Indeed this second of what is known as the five points of the doctrines of grace or historic Calvinism is a controversial subject, but *why?* It is not because of its complexity or obscurity, but because of how it challenges our natures, our human pride and our human perceptions of fairness.

- What is the only position that a Christian who claims to believe the Bible can take on the subject of election or predestination that is clearly anti-Biblical, whether they are more Arminian or Calvinistic? *That they just don’t believe in it at all! “That’s just not in the Bible!”* It is clearly a Biblical topic; that cannot be argued. The question is what does it mean?

DEFINITIONS: (all are related terms, really the same doctrine or teaching; one cannot be separated from the other)

Predestination - the doctrine that God decided at the beginning of time who would go to Heaven after death and who would not. This means much more than simply “foreknowledge”, but implies prepared for relationship beforehand.

Election - the fact of being chosen by God, or God's act of choosing somebody for salvation, a task, or special favor. The root word simply means "chosen."

Unconditional - complete or guaranteed, with no conditions, limitations, or provisos attached

Therefore, **unconditional election** refers to the decree and action of God whereby He chooses who will be saved without any basis, conditions or limitations

- How then can we understand the doctrine of election or predestination?
- **Two Approaches to this Teaching or Doctrine:**
 1. **Systematic Theology Approach**
 2. **Biblical Approach**

I. **Systematic Theology Approach to Election**

This does not mean that the approach is anti-Biblical or un-Biblical. It just means that the logic is more systematic based upon the systems observed in the Scriptures, as opposed to the Biblical approach. The Biblical approach is based upon texts of Scripture primarily, rather than systems of thought or theology.

God does expose Himself and His teachings for us in *systems* or organized structures of thought. Observing a system should not become the guide and authority without Biblical support. But systematic approaches can often be helpful for us to understand and to grasp such a doctrine.

One of the most famous systematic approaches to this issue was held at the Synod (or court) of Dort (in the Netherlands) from November 1618 through May 1619. This was after both Calvin and Arminius had both died. Neither taught a simple list of five points.

The followers of Arminius were petitioning the church of Holland to change their formal teaching from what Calvin and others had taught in general to the new ideas that Arminius had developed. They filed their complaints or remonstrance in five articles. The response of the Synod Dort were a reply to the five articles presented to them by the Arminians. These responses of the Synod of Dort (*not Calvin*) became known as the five points of Calvinism.

Their decisions and explanations are known as Canons (or rules) of Dort. The first chapter deals with the topic on unconditional election.

- There are two different ways to begin to discuss the concept of predestination:
 1. The mind of God in eternity past
 2. The nature and problem of man's sin nature

The Synod of Dort started with the second point about man's sin nature. Remember that Total Depravity is called the "root principle." *Why?* IF we get the doctrine of man's nature and sin correct, what conclusion other than (the need for) election can we have?

Let's review the Synod of Dort's Articles of this first Chapter about Unconditional Election:

- Article 1: Addresses the sin nature of man (Ref. Rom. 3:19, 23; 6:23)

With this perspective in mind, is God obligated to save *anyone*? *Should* God save *anyone*? If God saved *no one*, would he be unfair?

The question everyone focuses upon is "Why would God send anyone to hell?" The real question is "Why would God send anyone to heaven?"

- Article 2: Based upon the above nature of man, the need for the Gospel (good news for the problem) logically follows. (Ref. 1John 4:9; John 3:16)

One of the (many) false views or caricatures of election:

"Many want to be saved, but cannot because they are not elect!"

But, who seeks for God, who desires God, who desires to be saved and live for Him? (Rom. 3:11 – Again the issue is the depravity of man!) *Nobody!* *And*, if anyone desires to be saved, then "whosoever will may come!"

So, everyone gets what they want!

Example of the rich man in Luke 16:19-31: Although he was in torment in Hades and begged for mercy and some relief from his agony, he still was not repentant and did not ask that he might be released and join Lazarus in heaven.

- Article 3: God also provides the *means* for delivering the Gospel to mankind – preaching of the Word! (Ref. Rom. 10:14-15)

Since election is true, why is evangelism necessary? It is the means that God chose to work through! (He could have used any other means, but chose to work through us! What a privilege and responsibility to be involved in His Divine work!)

- Article 4: Describes the hopeless state of those who reject the Gospel. They are under the wrath of God.
- Article 5: Explains that the guilt is with man, *not* with God. Just like the gift (of grace) is with God, not with man! (Ref. Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 1:29)

Why is God not responsible for man's being lost if election is true?

Men are sinners by birth, nature and their own choice!

Men reject His grace by nature and their own choice!

In fact, God must *overcome* our sin, rejection and defiance toward His Gospel and grace!

If this were not true, then those who do believe must receive the Gospel because of something in themselves – a greater wisdom, nature, goodness, power of the will, etc. So they would have something to boast about within themselves that the lost do not! (As opposed to it being something in God!)

- Article 6: States that it is something in God! His eternal decree based only upon His good will and pleasure (love). Because of this will of God, He softens and draws His elect children. (Ref. Acts 15:18, Eph. 1:11)

Predestination and election shows us the very character and nature of God!

In leaving some sinners in their sin, His righteousness, holiness and justice.

In giving grace to some, His love, grace and mercy.

In fact, it is amazing that some **believers** find this doctrine so offensive and terrible!

*Who should find it so offensive and terrible? **Unbelievers!***

Believers should find this doctrine so comforting, consoling and assuring!

Why? Our salvation did not originate with us, nor does it depend upon us!

God saves us from beginning to end!

- Article 7: A Summary Statement, with five main points
 1. Election is the unchangeable purpose of God
 2. The only motive(s) for His choice is in His good pleasure and for His glory
 3. God chooses specific individuals for life
 4. These cannot boast in anyway about their election
 5. God does not just begin the process; from beginning to end it is of God
- Articles 8 -18 deal with specific details or aspects about election (These may need to be skipped?)
- Article 12: Deals with the **assurance** of election

How to cultivate the assurance of election:

 1. Do not try to know the mind of God directly. Apart from His revelation of Himself in His Word, we have *no* direct access to Him or His decrees. Trying to figure Him out on our own is hopeless and can lead to disastrous results!
 2. Look to the Scriptures. Let Him speak for Himself and believe it!
 3. Look to ourselves. What evidence can we see in ourselves as believers? Where does the true worship, love for God, desire for God, genuine love for others, Godly thoughts, etc. come from? (Anything good is certainly not from *us!*)
- Article 15: Deals with the very difficult issue of **reprobation** (the converse of election)

The doctrine of reprobation has two main parts:

 1. The passing over of some in His dispensation of grace
 2. The just condemnation and punishment of them for their sin and rejection

This is the most difficult aspect of the doctrine. But it illuminates election!

“God is in no sense the author of sin, but is the Savior from sin and the Judge of sin!”

(Ref. Rom. 9: “hated” is not “loved less”; and even the quoted source of Malachi 1:2-3 is clear that the issue is individuals not nations)

II. Biblical Approach to Election

Let the Bible speak for itself without any attempt to follow some systems of thought. It does not conflict with the above systematic approach, but rather supports it.

A. Various Verses (Read and discuss each)

First, what did Jesus say personally about this?

Matthew 22:14 (NASB) "For many are called, but few are **chosen**."

Mark 13:27 (NASB) "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven.

Luke 18:7 (NASB) now shall not God bring about justice for **His elect**, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

John 15:16 (NASB) "**You did not choose Me, but I chose you**, and **appointed you**, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.

What do we do with the following verse?

Acts 13:48 (NASB) And 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**.

(I have never heard of any explanation to this verse except to take it as it reads!)

Then consider the great teaching in Ephesians:

Ephes. 1:4-6, 11-12 (NASB) just 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** to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, [6] **to the praise of the glory of His grace**, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

[11] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined** according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, [12] to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be **to the praise of His glory**.

- **In fact, Ephesians 1 is a great study on this doctrine:**

Paul's approach is not as if this is an incidental or divisive theme, but as an essential, central and unifying theme! Like Romans 8, Ephesians 1 has a golden chain of blessings from God, and election is just one of them.

1. What to Speak

Election is Theocentric, not man centered!

On what basis did this choosing take place?

- a. not of us, because it was before we were (v. 4)
- b. in Christ, and because of Him (v. 5, 6)
- c. for God's pleasure & will (v. 5)
- d. **freely**, as God is free in election (v. 6)

God is utterly Sovereign in election. No where is the term "free will" (for man) found!

2. When to Speak

Some say that election is a problem and should be kept hidden, undiscussed and untaught. *What do you think?*

Why do some feel that way? Because it is mysterious and difficult, but so is the doctrine of the **Trinity!**

Because it is controversial, unpopular and divisive, but so is the doctrine of **hell!**

Because it is so "unfair" (by our standards), but so is the imputation of righteous to us and our sins to Christ!

What is the current impact and effects of the church **not addressing** this doctrine?

Man centered theology, man centered gospels – health, wealth, prosperity, shallow doctrine and teaching that does not take the Bible seriously, cheap emotional evangelism based on techniques and strategy rather than the power and promise of God, etc.

3. Why to Speak

Because it glorifies God! (Eph. 1:6)

Because it glorifies Christ!

Because it diminishes us!

- **How to Speak**

Humbly, with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love for others (Col. 3:12)

Do we speak about these things in this way, as ones who have **nothing** to boast about, and who are totally dependent upon God! **OR do we become somewhat “Arminian” in our view of election, in that we boast of our understanding of election (even though not in our salvation)?**

Other Scriptures:

Mark 13:20, 22, 27 (Same as in Matthew 24:22, 24, 31) (NASB) "And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the **elect whom He chose**, He shortened the days. [22] for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the **elect** astray. [27] "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth, to the farthest end of heaven.

Romans 8:33 (NASB) Who will bring a charge against **God's elect**? **God is the one who justifies**;

What comfort there is in the previous verse!

Col. 3:12 (NASB) And so, as those who have been **chosen of God**, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

1 Tim. 5:21 (NASB) I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of **His chosen angels**, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.

God evidently also chose the angels who did not rebel against Him.

Now consider how God addresses His children in the following:

2 Tim. 1:9 (NASB) who has saved us, and **called us with a holy calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

2 Tim. 2:10 (NASB) For this reason I endure all things for the sake of **those who are chosen**, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

Titus 1:1 (NASB) Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of **those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness,

1 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **who are chosen** [2] **according to the foreknowledge of God** the Father, by the sanctifying work of the

Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

In fact, the term is synonymous with believer or Christian. Notice how common this form of address is in the following:

1 Peter 5:13 (NASB) She who is in Babylon, **chosen together with you**, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.

2 John 1:1, 13 (NASB) The elder to **the chosen lady** and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, [13] The children of your chosen sister greet you.

Even to the end of the Scriptures and time, this is common:

Rev. 17:14 (NASB) "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are **the called and chosen and faithful.**"

Sometimes the elect is made synonymous with "beloved."

1 Thes. 1:4 (NASB) knowing, brethren **beloved by God, His choice of you;**

2 Thes. 2:13 (NASB) But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord**, because **God has chosen you** from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Notice the term "sheep" is another comparative term meaning the same:

John 10:26 (NASB) "But you do not believe, **because you are not of My sheep.**

Notice He did not say, "you are not of My sheep because you do not believe!"

Romans 8:29 (NASB) For **whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

What is the object of the verb "foreknow"? *whom* So this refers to God's foreknowledge of persons, not their choices or events!

Romans 11:28-29 (NASB) From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but **from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved** for the sake of the fathers; [29] **for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

Many who object to this doctrine, do not take offense with God's choice of Israel over all other nations and peoples:

Amos 3:2 (NASB) "**You only have I chosen** among all the families of the earth; Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities."

In fact, all God does throughout history is choose one person or thing after another! What is the basis (as it relates to man) of God's electing one and not another? The Bible never answers except in a negative sense (1Cor. 1) and a non-specific sense (Deu. 7).

1 Cor. 1:26-31 (NASB) For **consider your calling**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; [27] but **God has chosen** the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen** the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, [28] and the base things of the world and the despised, **God has chosen**, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, [29] that no man should boast before God. [30] But **by His doing you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, [31] that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Deut. 7:6-8 (NASB) "For you are **a holy people to the Lord** your God; the Lord your **God has chosen you** to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. [7] "**The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples**, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] **but because the Lord loved you** and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deut. 10:15 (NASB) "Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and **He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples**, as it is this day.

1 Samuel 12:22 (NASB) "For the Lord will not abandon His people on account of His great name, **because the Lord has been pleased to make you a people for Himself**.

Psalms 33:12 (NASB) Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,
The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.

Read and study **Romans Chapter 9**, especially focusing on verses **8-26**. **What does this mean?**

Romans 9:8-26 (NASB)

That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. [9] For this is a word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." [10] And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; [11] for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that **God's purpose according to His choice** might stand, not because of works, but because of

Him who calls, [12] it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." [13] Just as it is written, "**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**"

[14] **What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?** May it never be! [15] For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." [16] So then **it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.** [17] For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." [18] So then **He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.**

[19] **You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"** [20] On the contrary, **who are you, O man, who answers back to God?** The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? [21] Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? [22] What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? [23] And **He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,** [24] **even us, whom He also called,** not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. [25] As He says also in Hosea,

"**I will call those** who were not My people, 'My people,'
And her who was not beloved, 'beloved.' "

[26] "And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,'

There they shall be called sons of THE LIVING God."

Does our view of election anticipate the kind of responses that Paul obviously did in the above passage? (That it is not fair, it is unjust; and that how does God hold us accountable if we are not in control, how do we balance His sovereignty with our responsibility, etc.) If it does not, perhaps we don't have the right view. If we have found a view that makes it easy to take or accept, it probably is wrong!

The theologian A. A. Hodge has well remarked that, "**rightly understood, this doctrine (1) exalts the majesty and absolute sovereignty of God, while it illustrates the riches of his free grace and his just displeasure with sin. (2.)** It enforces upon us the essential truth that **salvation is entirely of grace.** That **no one can either complain** if passed over, **or boast** himself if saved. **(3.)** It brings the inquirer to **absolute self-despair and the cordial embrace of the free offer of Christ. (4.)** In the case of the believer who has the witness in himself, **this doctrine at once deepens his humility and elevates his confidence to the full assurance of hope"**

- **Comparison of the two views of Election:**

REF: Charts Nos. 56, 57, & 58 in *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine*

Arminianism or “Conditional” VS. Calvinism or “Unconditional”

Discuss these verses as opposing the Unconditional Election view:

Ezekiel 33:11 (NASB) "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'

1 Tim. 2:3-4 (NASB) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

John 3:5-7 (NASB)

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

1 Peter 1:16 (NASB) because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Matthew 11:28 (NASB) "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Romans 10:13 (NASB) for "Whoever WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE Lord will be saved."

Romans 8:29 (NASB) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;

1 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen [2] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

- J. I. Packer said "The Arminians say I owe my election to my faith; the Calvinist says I owe my faith to my election."
- **Quotes from Spurgeon about Election (pages 62 – 66 of *2200 Quotations*)**