



Soteriology

Predestination and Election

Lesson Overview: Understanding Terms, The Basis for Election, The New Testament's Presentation of Election, and Common Misunderstandings of Election.

Introduction:

Predestination and election are foundational doctrines that reveal God's sovereign plan of salvation. Understanding these truths helps us see how God's eternal purposes unfold and why our salvation rests entirely in His grace.

I. What do Predestination and Election Mean?

A. Predestination

1. The word that we see in our Bibles as "predestined" or "predestinated" comes from the Greek verb *proorizō*. This word means to set boundaries beforehand, appoint, or determine beforehand.¹
2. "To predestine is to preplan a destiny. The word *proorizō* means to mark off beforehand. The death of Christ and its meaning were predestined by God (Acts 4:28; 1 Cor. 2:7). God's elect are predestined to adoption (Eph. 1:5), to an inheritance (v. 11), and to ultimate conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:28–29)."²
3. The term "predestination" in theology means God's foreordination of persons to a particular end.³
4. Where do we see the word "*proorizō*" in Scripture?
 - † **Acts 4:27-28** — ²⁷ *For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,* ²⁸ *For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel **determined before** to be done.*
 - † **Romans 8:28-31** — ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For whom he did foreknow, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* ³⁰ *Moreover whom he did **predestinate**, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.* ³¹ *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*
 - † **1 Corinthians 2:6-8** — ⁶ *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God **ordained***

¹ Thoralf Gilbrant, "Προορίζω," in *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1991).

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 361.

³ Kirk R. MacGregor, "Predestination," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

before the world unto our glory: ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- † **Ephesians 1:4-5** — ⁴ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having **predestinated** us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,
- † **Ephesians 1:11** — In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being **predestinated** according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:
 - What things are predestinated in these verses? Why would God predestinate those things? Why were individuals predestinated?

B. Election

1. In Greek, the terms associated with election are eklegomai, eklektos, and eklogē. They describe a choice, or something that is chosen.⁴
2. In reference to theology, election is “the free and sovereign choice of God, made in eternity past, to set his love on certain individuals, and, on the basis of nothing in themselves but solely because of the good pleasure of his will, to choose them to be saved from sin and damnation and to inherit the blessings of eternal life through the mediatorial work of Christ.”⁵
3. Where do we see these Greek words in Scripture?
 - † **Matthew 20:16** — *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*
 - † **Matthew 24:22** — *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the **elect’s** sake those days shall be shortened.*
 - † **Luke 18:7-8** — ⁷ And shall not God avenge his own **elect**, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? ⁸ I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*
 - † **Romans 8:32-33** — ³² He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s **elect**? It is God that justifieth.
 - † **Colossians 3:12** — *Put on therefore, as the **elect** of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*
 - † **2 Timothy 2:10** — *Therefore I endure all things for the **elect’s** sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*
 - † **1 Peter 1:1-2** — ¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² **Elect** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: *Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*
 - What is elected in these verses? What is said about them? There seems to be a group of people who are elected to salvation.

C. Comparing the two Terms

⁴ A. Chadwick Thornhill, “Election,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁵ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 493.

1. Predestination draws the bounds while election marks out those who will be put inside it.
2. So people have been predestined to a for sure end, and God has elected who fits where.
3. “Election is God’s choosing whom he would save (2 Thess 2:13); predestination is God’s decree to secure that end. Moreover, predestination is a broader term that may be used of salvation (Rom 8:28–30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5) or of God’s foreordained purposing of all things (Acts 4:28; cf. Ps 139:16; Eph 1:11; 2 Tim 1:9).”⁶

II. What is the Basis of Election?

- When talking about election, it’s important to understand why believers were chosen for salvation. Was it their faith that caused them to be elected? Was it God rolling the dice to see who wins?

A. What is conditional election?

1. Conditional election is the view that God bases His election of people to salvation on their condition of faith. This position is rooted in the idea of foreknowledge referred to in Romans 8:29.
† **Romans 8:29** — *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*
2. “Those that hold this view posit that God has chosen those whom he will save because in eternity past he looked ahead into the future and foresaw who would believe in Christ and who would reject him. God is often pictured as ‘looking down the corridors of time’ and discovering those who according to their own free will would believe in Christ—these he chose to save on the basis of their foreseen faith. Discovering that the rest would reject Christ, he decided not to save them on the basis of their lack of faith.”⁷
3. This leaves man ultimately responsible to turn to God in faith and makes man, rather than God, the final determiner of the outcome. Election becomes the result of man’s choice, not God’s choice of individuals.

B. What are the issues with conditional election?

1. Conditional Election goes against the nature of God’s sovereign decree. This position misunderstands that the events of the future take place precisely because God has decreed them to take place.⁸ God doesn’t make His sovereign decree because He knows what the future holds; He knows what the future holds because He sovereignly decreed it to come to pass.
2. This view of election inherently misunderstands what foreknowledge means biblically. The Greek word “proginōskō,” which is translated as “foreknow,” speaks not of simple foreknowledge but of the knowledge that characterizes an intimate personal relationship.⁹ This word doesn’t merely mean to have knowledge of who would have faith in God, but it means to know in an intimate way. While God knows all things in His omniscience, He intimately knows those whom He has predestinated.

⁶ Fred G. Zaspel, “[Predestination](#),” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

⁷ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 498.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 499.

- † **1 Corinthians 8:2-3** — ² *If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.* ³ *But if anyone loves God, he is known by God (ESV) .*
- † **2 Timothy 2:19** — *Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*
- † **Galatians 4:9** — *But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?*

C. What is unconditional election?

- Why were some elected to receive salvation? What was the basis for the choice of God to save some?
1. Unconditional refers to the fact that there is nothing you can do or have done to merit your own election. It is wholly of grace and wholly by God.

† **Ephesians 1:3-12** — ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:* ⁴ *According as **he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:* ⁵ ***Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*** ⁶ ***To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*** ⁷ *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, **according to the riches of his grace;*** ⁸ *Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;* ⁹ *Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, **according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:*** ¹⁰ *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:* ¹¹ *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, **being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*** ¹² ***That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.***
 2. This position states that God chose His elect to be in Christ before the foundations of the world in eternity past. He predestined them to be adopted into the family of God because that was His good pleasure. He made us accepted in the beloved Christ to the praise of His own glory. He did this according to the riches of His grace. We received an eternal inheritance because we were predestined according to the purpose of God, who works everything according to His own plan. He did this so that we would be to the praise of His glory.
 3. Election is based on God's own will, not man's will. That's the point that Paul seemingly argues in Romans 9.
 - **Romans 9:9-16** — ⁹ *For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.* ¹⁰ *And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;* ¹¹ ***(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)*** ¹² *It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.* ¹³ *As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* ¹⁴ *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* ¹⁵ ***For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*** ¹⁶

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

4. Another Scripture to consider:
 - † **2 Timothy 1:8-9** — ⁸ *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,* 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* (ESV),
5. “While faith is a condition of justification, it is not a condition of election. Election is unconditional.”¹⁰ God has chosen His elect before the foundation of the world, not based on their own merit, but based wholly on His good pleasure and grace.

III. How does the New Testament Present Election?

- These points are from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. They are very beneficial for a correct outlook on this beautiful doctrine.

A. Election brings comfort.

- **Romans 8:28-30** — ²⁸ *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* ²⁹ *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* ³⁰ *Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*
- 1. “Paul’s point is to say that God has *always* acted for the good of those whom he called to himself. If Paul looks into the distant past before the creation of the world, he sees that God foreknew and predestined his people to be conformed to the image of Christ. If he looks at the recent past, he finds that God called and justified his people whom he had predestined. And if he then looks toward the future when Christ returns, he sees that God has determined to give perfect glorified bodies to those who believe in Christ. From eternity to eternity God has acted with the good of his people in mind. 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?”¹¹
- 2. If from eternity to eternity God is working everything out for the good of His people, how much comfort should that bring to current circumstances? Election should be a comfort to those who trust in Christ in everyday situations.

B. Election provides a reason for praise.

- † **Ephesians 1:5-6** — ⁵ *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,* ⁶ *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*
- † **1 Thessalonians 1:2, 4** — ² *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;* ⁴ *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*
- † **2 Thessalonians 2:13** — *But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*

¹⁰ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 503.

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 820–821.

1. Paul states that he is bound to be in constant thanks because of God's electing grace to those in Thessalonica.
2. "The doctrine of election increases 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."¹²

C. Election is an encouragement to evangelism.

- † **2 Timothy 2:10** — *Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*
1. "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."¹³
 2. Election should never be a discouragement to evangelism, but rather the fuel on the fire. It is because of God's electing grace that the gospel will produce fruit. The harvest is plentiful, so pray that the Lord will send laborers into the harvest.

IV. Common Misunderstandings of Election

A. "Election means Fatalism."

1. "Popularly, this objection is expressed like this: 'What's going to be is going to be anyway, and I cannot do anything about it.' There are two very important differences between the biblical doctrine of the decree of God and the false teaching of fatalism. (1) Behind the decree is an intelligent, loving Being. Behind fatalism lies only impersonal blind chance. (2) Fatalism has no place for the importance of means. It only emphasizes ends. The decree of God includes all the means essential to arriving at the ends. And those means are as essential as the ends. Thus, the biblical doctrine gives proper place to human responsibility. What's going to be is going to be through certain means and procedures and responsible human actions."¹⁴
2. Election does not remove personal choice and responsibility. Jesus calls men to repentance, and mankind is responsible for responding to that call. Election guarantees that the call to repentance will be responded to in faith.

B. "Election compromises human freedom."

1. "This is the same objection raised in Romans 9:19: Why can God fault anyone, since no one really resists His will if everything is part of His plan? Though it is true that God has the right to do anything consistent with His nature, it is equally true that He has chosen to exercise His rights by including the responsible and relatively free actions of people (Philemon 14; Rev. 17:13 linked with v. 17)."¹⁵
2. "An illustration: Does God know the day you are going to die? The answer is yes, He does. Question: Could you die a day sooner? The answer is no. Question: Then why do you eat? Answer: to live. The means of eating is essential to the end of living to the preordained day of

¹² Ibid., 821.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 821.

¹⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 363–364.

¹⁵ Ibid., 364.

death. From this point on the illustration can easily and uselessly get into the realm of the hypothetical. Suppose I do not eat? Then I will die. Would that be the day God planned that I should die? These are questions that do not need to be asked or answered. Just eat.”¹⁶

3. “Or again: Does God know who are elect? Of course, He elected them. Can any of them be lost? No. Then why pray and witness? Because that is how they will be saved. Will any of them fail to believe? No. Then why do they have to believe? Because that is the only way they can be saved, and unless they do believe they will not be saved. Do not let your mind ask the theoretical and useless questions. Let your mind and your life concentrate on doing what is God’s will and making sure you act responsibly.”¹⁷

C. “Election means that unbelievers never get the chance to believe.”

1. This is an unbiblical argument. When people rejected Jesus, He always put the blame on their willful choice to reject Him, not on anything decreed by God the Father. Look at these examples.
 - † **John 8:43-44** — ⁴³ *Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. ⁴⁴ Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*
 - † **Matthew 23:37** — *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*
 - † **John 5:39-40** — ³⁹ *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. ⁴⁰ And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*
2. Romans 1 even says that unbelievers are without excuse for their rejection of Christ. People who remain in unbelief do so because they are unwilling to come to God, and the blame for such unbelief always lies with the unbelievers themselves, never with God.¹⁸

D. “Election isn’t fair.”

1. **What if God were fair to man? Where would that leave every person for all eternity?** Fair is the last thing that we want. It wasn’t fair for Christ to be beaten and crucified for the sins of wicked mankind. Fair would be us going to Hell for all eternity. That is the point of grace. The fact that God saves any man is wholly of grace. What right do we have to argue with God’s decisions?
2. “Paul raises this objection in Romans 9. After saying that God ‘has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills’ (Rom. 9:18), Paul then raises this precise objection: ‘You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”’ (Rom. 9:19). Here is the heart of the ‘unfairness’ objection against the doctrine of election. If each person’s ultimate destiny is determined by God, not by the person himself or herself (that is, even when people make willing choices that determine whether they will be saved or not, if God is actually behind those choices somehow ordaining or indirectly causing them to occur), then how can this be fair?”¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 364.

¹⁷ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 364.

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 830.

¹⁹ Ibid., 831.

† **Romans 9:20-24** — ²⁰ *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”* ²¹ *Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?* ²² *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* (ESV)?

3. “Paul simply says that there is a point beyond which we cannot answer back to God or question his justice. He has done what he has done according to his sovereign will. He is the Creator; we are the creatures, and we ultimately have no basis from which to accuse him of unfairness or injustice.”²⁰

Conclusion:

The biblical teaching on predestination and election is not meant to create confusion but to provide believers with comfort, praise, and confidence in God’s plan. Far from removing responsibility, it calls us to trust Christ, live in holiness, and proclaim the gospel boldly. Ultimately, election magnifies the glory of God’s grace, reminding us that our salvation is fully His work from beginning to end.

²⁰ Ibid., 832.