

The Doctrines of Grace (5): election defended Hymns 223, Let God Arise/Mighty Lord Extend Your Kingdom, 218

I mentioned last week that I wanted to consider the subject of unconditional election under three headings—election defined, defended, and applied. Last week I defined election as God's gracious choice of individuals, from eternity, for salvation, based solely upon His covenant love.

That brings us this morning to defend election from various objections that have been raised against it over the years. Now, I have worked hard this past week to gather together the best objections I've heard against the truth of unconditional election. I want to state each objection and then offer a few thoughts in response.

- I. Election is Unto Service
- II. Election is Unjust or Unfair
- III. Election Destroys Evangelism
- IV. Election Imputes Partiality to God
- V. Election is Based on Foreknowledge

I. Election is Unto Service

1. This objection points out that both in the Old and New Testaments, there is an election to office and service.
2. For example, in the OT Saul was chosen as king (1Sam.10:24), and in the NT Judas was chosen as an apostle (Jn.6:70).
3. In both of these cases, these men were chosen for office and service, but neither were chosen for salvation.
4. (1) We agree there's an election to office or service, Jn.6:70—"Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"
5. Here our Savior speaks of an election unto office—He chose all twelve, even though, one was a devil.
6. Thus, this doesn't mean He chose all twelve to salvation, but He chose all twelve to the office of apostle.
7. Jn.15:16—"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."
8. This is said of the eleven, as Judas has already left the disciples—our Savior chose and appointed them apostles.
9. Jn.15:19—"You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world"—here "chose" likely refers to "call."
10. Christ chose them out of the world in that He called them out of the world—He called them to Himself.
11. Thus, we agree that at times Scriptures speaks of an election to office or service (old and New Testaments).
12. (2) The election we speak about is unto salvation, 2Thess.2:13—"God from the beginning has chose you for salvation."
13. Yes, God chose His people for service, but a service that results from salvation—He chose us for salvation.
14. Rom.8:29—"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son."
15. All of the elect were chosen for salvation or to be conformed to the image of Christ—this is what we were elected for.

16. Thus, while we do not deny that Scriptures speaks of an election unto mere office or serve, it also teaches, an election unto salvation.

II. Election is Unjust or Unfair

1. This is obviously a very common objection, and while it comes in different forms, it basically says unconditional election renders God unjust.
2. And here's the reason—because election suggests that God sends people to hell for no reason but His will.
3. This objection concerns the corollary (or consequence) of election—if God chooses some for salvation then He must choose others for damnation.
4. But this is where things get a little complicated, and the reason being, we have to speak about the order of God's decree.
5. And the difficulty is this—while we speak of the order of God's decrees, these are actually one eternal act in God.
6. But the Scriptures allow us, and actually even demand us, to suggest a logical order within God's decrees.
7. And logically, according to the Scriptures, God decreed to create, allow the fall, and then elect a people.
8. This means that God elects a people out of fallen humanity, and He leaves the rest to justly perish in their sin (let me suggest three reasons).
9. You see, this is where many people go astray—they think that God chose to create man, elect some to heave and others to hell, without any concern for their sin and guilt.
10. But this isn't true—God's chose to create man, allow them to fall into sin, and then from that fallen mass of humanity, elected a people for salvation and left the others for damnation (for reasons we shall see in a minute).
11. Thus, at this point, I want to suggest three reasons why I suggest, God's decree of election follows the fall.
12. (1) Election views man as fallen and guilty—Romans 9-11 have an important connection to the previous chapters—they really answer an anticipated question.
13. Within chapters 1-3 Paul makes very plain, all men by nature are equally depraved and in need of redemption.
14. In Chapters 4-8 he makes equally plain, there's one common salvation for all men whether Jew or Gentile.
15. In short, within chapters 1-8 Paul has one basic theme—all men are lost in Adam and all men are recovered in Christ.
16. Thus, it makes little different if you are natively a Jew or Gentile—all are equally fallen and equally recovered.
17. In summary, you're not a child of God because you've been outwardly circumcised, but only if you've been inwardly circumcised by the Spirit.
18. This would have anticipated a question—Does this mean that the promises of God to Israel have failed?
19. V6—"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel."
20. In other words—the promises made to Israel are ultimately being fulfilled in a remnant called true Israel.
21. This means, God always had a true people within the larger nation—He had a true Israel within Israel (a spiritual Israel within physical Israel).

22. This anticipates another question—If God has a people within a people who ultimately make this decision?
23. Who chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau? V11—"for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls."
24. Notice the phrase, v11—"the purpose of God according to election"—this is what determined the Israel within Israel.
25. And what was the reason behind this election? V13—"As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."
26. In other words, as we learned last week, God loved the elect (Jacob) in a way He did not love the non-elect (Esau).
27. V14—"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!"—he then provides two simple answers—God's sovereign mercy and justice.
28. God has the right to bestow mercy on whom He wills and He has the right to harden whom He wills (v18).
29. V21—"Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor."
30. In verses 22-23, he continues this thought by describing these are vessels of His mercy and His wrath.
31. Brethren, only fallen and guilty humanity can be objects of God's mercy and wrath, as mercy and wrath both presuppose guilt.
32. You can only show mercy to those in misery and you can only bestow wrath upon those who are guilty.
33. Thus, God chose from the same lump, fallen humanity, some to display His mercy and others to display His wrath.
34. (2) Election is gracious and unto life—the NT speaks of election as God's positive choice of some to life.
35. This means, while God elects some to eternal life, He bypasses the others, leaving them justly in their sin.
36. Thus, Scripture makes a distinction between what's often called election and reprobation (to reprobate means to reject or bypass).
37. Election is applied to God's positive choice of some to eternal life, whereas reprobation refers to God's choice to leave the rest in their sin.
38. And so, while both are equally and eternally decreed, the one is gracious and underserved, the other is just and righteous.
39. Put another way, both election and reprobation view mankind as fallen and corrupt—election is gracious and reprobation is just.
40. You see, for God to save someone He must do something, but for Him to reprobate someone, He simply leaves them alone.
41. Romans 9:18—"Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens"—one is positive the other negative.
42. For God to show mercy He calls and saves the sinner from sin, but to harden, He merely leaves the sinner to himself.
43. Canons of Dort—"Some are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God, whom God decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves."
44. Notice how the Canons of Dort speak of election only as positive—"some are elected"—that is, to eternal life.

45. Whereas it describes reprobation is passive—"while others are passed by in the eternal election of God."
46. 2LBC—"By the decree of God, some men and angels are predestined, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ, to the praise of His glorious grace; others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice."
47. (3) Election is in Christ, Eph.1:4—"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"—the Father chose us in Christ.
48. Eph.1:3—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."
49. Paul then elaborates on what these blessings entail—election (v4), adoption (v5) and redemption (v7).
50. This means our election viewed us as fallen, and thus, the fall was prior to election in God's eternal decrees.
51. God decreed to create a world, allow man to fall into sin, He then chose Christ as the Savior of the world, and elected a people to be saved in Him.
52. Isa.42:1—"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."
53. To put this a little more precise—God's decree to save follows His decree to create and allow the fall.

III. Election Destroys Evangelism

1. This objection goes like this—if God has already chosen a people for salvation then why preach about salvation?
2. Put another way—if God has already determined who will be saved then why do anything about it (let me suggest three responses)?
3. (1) This objection contradicts Scripture and experience—that is, scripture and church history are filled with missionaries who believed in election.
4. 2Tim.2:10—"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."
5. Paul took the gospel to three continents and endured all manner of severe tribulations and afflictions.
6. Why? Why did endure "all things"? "For the sake of the elect"—that they would be saved by his gospel.
7. Furthermore, all of the great missionaries throughout church history have, almost without exception, been Reformed.
8. George Whitfield, William Cary, David Brainerd, George Muller, and Adoniram Judson, all believed in unconditional election.
9. How many times have you heard—Never become a Calvinists because Calvinists don't believe in evangelism.
10. And surely brethren, there have been some "Calvinists" who have opposed evangelism and missions.
11. But these have been hyper or unbalanced Calvinists, who are in fact, not truly historical Calvinists at all.
12. Bob Selph—"History provides all the evidence necessary to prove the ludicrous nature of the claim that election kills evangelism. Consider all the major missionary movements, along with the Great Awakening in America. Consider the great Protestant Reformation in Europe. It is easily demonstrated that believers in Unconditional Election have led the way in missionary zeal and effort."

13. (2) This objection fails to understand election is one part of God's decree—God's decree includes everything that happens.
14. God's decree is universal—it includes everything that happens without exception—good, bad, big, and small.
15. Here's my point—if everything has already been decreed, then why do anything—why not just lie down and die?
16. Here's why—because God's eternal decree in no way denies the reasonability or free-actions of men.
17. Acts 2:23—"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death."
18. Notice, while God pre-determined the crucifixion of Christ, those who crucified Christ were responsible.
19. (3) This objection fails to understand God decrees the end as well as the means—election isn't salvation.
20. 2Thess.2:13-14—"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel."
21. 1Thess.1:4-5—"Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance."
22. Joel Beeke—"One consequence of locating election in the larger decree is that the goals of election cannot be attained apart from the means decreed by God. The elect must and will hear the gospel call, respond with justifying faith, and persevere in faith unto glory."
23. George Whitfield (in letter to John Wesley in 1740, responds to Wesley's first objection to election, 'If there be an election then is all preaching vain; it is needless to them that are elected; for they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be saved')—"Oh, dear sir, what kind of reasoning is this! Has not God, who has appointed salvation for a certain number, appointed also the preaching of the word as a means to bring them to it? Does any one hold election in any other sense? And if so, how is preaching needless to them that are elected, when the gospel is designed by God himself to be the power of God unto their salvation."

IV. Election Imputes Partiality to God

1. This too is a very common objection—fundamentally it says this—if God chooses some and not others, then God is not impartial.
2. Rom.2:11—"For there is no partiality with God"—well, what do we say in response to this objection?
3. (1) The context of this statement is that God renders to all men in accordance to their works regardless if they are Jew or Gentile.
4. God shows no partiality with regards to nationality, gender, age, or social status—all are dealt with equally.
5. Rev.7:9—"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."
6. (2) God isn't impartial because He doesn't owe any man anything—God is free to show mercy to whom He wills.
7. For example, if two men worked all day and earned a salary, the boss is free to give one an undeserved bonus.

8. If the boss gave one a bonus and not the other, neither of them can complain or claim the boss is partial.
9. The boss has the freedom to give to one something he does not give to the other—neither can complain.
10. John Calvin—"The fact that God chooses one man but rejects another arises not out of regard to the man but solely from His mercy, which ought to be free to manifest and express itself where and when He pleases

V. Election is Based on Foreknowledge

1. This is likely the most common objection to the doctrine of election—God elects those He foreknew would believe.
2. (1) This distorts the nature of God—to assert that God looks into the future to know it, dishonors God.
3. God does not need to look into the future to know anything—God knows all things past and future perfectly and simultaneously.
4. (2) This ignores the clear teaching of the NT that election is based upon God's will and not man's faith.
5. 1Thess.1:4-5—"Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance."
6. (3) This misunderstands the meaning of foreknowledge—within Scripture to foreknow is to fore-love.
7. The foreknowledge of God doesn't refer to knowledge that He has before, but a love that He has before.
8. Gen.4:1—"Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" Jer.1:5—"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."
9. Matt.7:23—"And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"
10. Rom.11:2—"God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew"—this refers to the Israel within Israel.
11. Rom.8:30—"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (1Pet.1:1-2)."
12. Closing Question—How should we handle professing Christians who deny (reject) unconditional election?
13. But before I answer this question, let me first start with an assumption—true Christians can deny unconditional election.
14. Now, I am well aware there have been some Christians who deny this assumption—they believe you cannot be truly Christian and deny unconditional election.
15. But this would render unconditional election as the gospel, and would practically replace Christ with election.
16. You are not saved because you believe in election, nor are you unsaved because you don't believe in election.
17. Let me clarify—as we shall see next week, God-willing, the doctrine of election is extremely practical.
18. Furthermore, regardless how practical it is, even more importantly, it's clearly found in Holy Scripture (thus, it's very important).
19. And yet, we will all know people who clearly are trusting in Christ alone for their salvation, and yet, they are unclear on election (how should we handle them?).

20. (a) Humbly—by this I mean, we have to remember, a proud Calvinist is in fact a very poor Calvinist.
21. We must remember—just as it's God's grace that separates us from sinners, so it's the same grace that separates us from saints.
22. I really fear some Christians, who call themselves Calvinists, show very little humility and love toward others.
23. As we will see next week, one practical application of unconditional election is that it produces humility.
24. Thus, one way in which we can judge our Calvinism is to ask the question—does it produce humility?
25. (b) Patiently—by this I mean, we must patient with those who, for various reasons, are slow in grasping this point.
26. Many if not most of us, have to admit, that we too at one time misunderstood or even denied this truth.
27. Brethren, we must confess, that while election is clearly taught in the Bible, in many ways it's a difficult doctrine.
28. (c) Truthfully—by this I mean, we need never be ashamed or embarrassed of the truths of Holy Scripture.
29. I earlier mentioned a letter that George Whitefield wrote to John Wesley on the subject—Why Preach Electing Grace?
30. George Whitefield (in the second paragraph)—"This letter no doubt will lose me many friends. And for this cause, perhaps, God has laid this difficult task upon me, even to see whether I am willing to forsake all for Him, or not."