

# Unconditional Election

## From CFBC's "What We Teach" (Election)

We teach that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

We teach that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part or to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4-7; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign, but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Romans 9:11-16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25-28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

## Introduction...

### R C Sproul on TULIP and Reformed Theology: Unconditional Election

The Reformed view of election, known as unconditional election, means that ***God does not foresee an action or condition on our part that induces Him to save us.*** Rather, ***election rests on God's sovereign decision to save whomever He is pleased to save.***

***In the book of Romans, we find a discussion of this difficult concept.***

***Romans 9:10–13*** reads: "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.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" ***Here the Apostle Paul is giving his exposition of the doctrine of election.***

**He deals with it significantly in Romans 8, but here he illustrates his teaching of the doctrine of election by going back into the past of the Jewish people and looking at the circumstances surrounding the birth of twins—Jacob and Esau.** In the ancient world, it was customary for the firstborn son to receive the inheritance or the patriarchal blessing. However, in the case of these twins, God reversed the process and gave the blessing not to the elder but to the younger. **The point that the Apostle labors here is that God not only makes this decision prior to the twins' births, He does it without a view to anything they would do, either good or evil, so that the purposes of God might stand. Therefore, our salvation does not rest on us; it rests solely on the gracious, sovereign decision of God.**

**This doesn't mean that God will save people whether they come to faith or not.** There are conditions that God decrees for salvation, not the least of which is putting one's personal trust in Christ. However, that is a condition for justification, and the doctrine of election is something else. When we're talking about unconditional election, we're talking in a very narrow confine of the doctrine of election itself.

So, then, on what basis does God elect to save certain people? **Is it on the basis of some foreseen reaction, response, or activity of the elect?** Many people who have a doctrine of election or predestination look at it this way. They believe that in eternity past God looked down through the corridors of time and He knew in advance who would say yes to the offer of the gospel and who would say no. On the basis of this prior knowledge of those who will meet the condition for salvation—that is, expressing faith or belief in Christ—He elects to save them. **This is conditional election, which means that God distributes His electing grace on the basis of some foreseen condition that human beings meet themselves.**

**Unconditional election is another term that I think can be a bit misleading, so I prefer to use the term sovereign election. If God chooses sovereignly to bestow His grace on some sinners and withhold His grace from other sinners, is there any violation of justice in this? Do those who do not receive this gift receive something they do not deserve? Of course not.** If God allows these sinners to perish, is He treating them unjustly? Of course not. One group receives grace; the other receives justice. **No one receives injustice. Paul anticipates this protest: "Is there injustice on God's part?" (Rom. 9:14a). He answers it with the most emphatic response he can muster. I prefer the translation, "God forbid" (v. 14b). Then he goes on to amplify this response: "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (v. 15).** Here the Apostle is reminding his reader of what Moses declared centuries before; namely, that it is God's divine right to execute clemency when and where He desires. He says from the beginning, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." It is not on those who meet some conditions, but on those whom He is pleased to bestow the benefit.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/tulip-and-reformed-theology-unconditional-election>

## William Perkins on Election

***Election is God's decree whereby, of His own free will, He has predestined certain men to salvation to the praise of the glory of His name (Eph. 1:4–6; 1 Thess. 5:9). Far from being a tangential doctrine, election is the golden thread that runs through the whole Christian system. Moreover, election is the friend of sinners—and therefore a most blessed doctrine.***

***Election is God's positive choice, by His sheer sovereignty and out of His grace, to love some for salvation (Rom. 9:13–26; 1 Thess. 5:9). God's election is in no way universal or general, for God did not ordain all mankind to be reconciled to Himself.*** Rather, those whom He foreknew He predestined (Rom. 8:29). Here foreknew is used in the sense of choosing or ordaining people (1 Peter 1:2; cf. Rom. 11:2). ***Because many have wrongly attributed divine knowledge of man's future faith as causative of God's decree, it is essential to note that God's wise foreknowledge is both free and logically (in contrast to temporally) secondary to His willful ordination. Before the foundation of the world God singled out and appointed some to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13). He did not appoint those whom He foreknew would be conformed to Christ; rather, those whom He foreknew (favorably chose) He predestined to be conformed to His own image.***

***Jesus Christ is the whole foundation of election.*** Christ was called of His Father from all eternity to perform the work of salvation for His people (Heb. 5:5; 7:22; 13:20). ***In electing to perform the work of salvation, Christ is not subordinate to the Father with regard to the decree itself since He has decreed all things with the Father (John 15:16); rather, He became subordinate in its execution through His servanthood and humiliation (1 Peter 1:20).***

***Election can never be separated from Christ, as the elect have this status only in Christ.*** Furthermore, election is so closely linked to Christ that, in order to understand the true nature of election itself, one must look to the ordaining of the Mediator (Isa. 42:1; Heb. 9:15). ***This is why any who struggle with understanding this doctrine must be brought to view election particularly in Christ, for in Him are all those who are chosen of God (Eph. 1:4).*** The believer is chosen in Christ as His own inheritance (Deut. 32:9; Ps. 2:8; Heb. 12:2; cf. John 6:39; 17:16; Eph. 1:11; 1 Peter 2:6,9)...

The degrees of execution are the working out of election in the life of the believer. These are the steps by which God puts into action His eternal love (cf. Acts 13:48). ***For those whom God has elected to inherit eternal life, He has also ordained the subordinate means whereby, in steps, they attain their ordained end (Eph. 1:4–5; 2 Thess. 2:13; cf. John 6:37; Eph. 2:8–9). Without these steps, by which God puts into action His eternal love, salvation would be unobtainable (Rom. 8:29–30). Broadly speaking, these steps are known as effectual calling, regeneration, justification, sanctification, and***

***glorification. Thus, salvation worked out experientially in the soul of the believer is inseparable from sovereign election in Christ.***

Sadly, some view election as a stumbling block to coming to Christ by faith. Unfortunately, their worry is not first “Do I have Christ?” but rather “Am I elect?” Based on this skewed perspective such people have viewed election through a convoluted lens. It must be recognized that ***election is impossible to ascertain apart from the prior receiving of salvation by faith, upon which, in conjunction with the resultant works, election is made sure (cf. 2 Peter 1:10). Furthermore, since Christ declares to all sinners, “Repent and believe, and you will be saved,” there need not be a question of one’s status other than that of sinner.*** Thirsty sinners (Isa. 55:1); willing sinners (Rev. 22:17); heavy-laden sinners (Matt. 11:28); adulterous sinners (Jer. 3:1); lost sinners (Luke 19:10); and, yes, even the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)—to all the Lord declares, “Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men” (Prov. 8:4). Therefore, as the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, “Repent ye and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

—adapted from William Perkins, A Golden Chaine, chs. 15, 31, 35—38, 48

## **Unconditional Election...Why Some Believe and Others Remain in Their Sin (a consideration of the Canons of Dort)**

Cornelis P. Venema

The importance of the teaching of unconditional election, the first main point of doctrine affirmed in the Canons of Dort, cannot be overstated. ***As J. I. Packer once put it, the doctrine of election preserves the simple gospel truth that “God saves sinners.” Sinners do not save themselves. Only God saves, and he does so out of his undeserved love and free decision to grant his people salvation in Christ—and that “before the foundation of the world”!*** By affirming this, the Synod of Dort preserved the biblical teaching that salvation is by grace alone. And at the same time, the Synod of Dort provided a sure footing for confidence in God’s invincible grace in Christ.

## **The Arminian Doctrine of Conditional Predestination**

***To appreciate the Canons’ teaching on unconditional election, it is important to remember that they were articulated in a specific historical context. The Synod of Dort was convened to address the controversy that broke out in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands in response to the teaching of James Arminius (1560-1609) and his followers, the “Remonstrants.”*** Arminius, a brilliant student of Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva, initiated the controversy during his tenure as a pastor of the Reformed church in Amsterdam and subsequently as a professor of theology at the University of Leiden.

Shortly before his death in 1609, Arminius summarized his teaching on election in two important works, his Public Disputations and Declaration of Sentiments. In these works, **Arminius expressed serious objections to the Reformed view of unconditional election as it was set forth in Article 16 of the Belgic Confession. According to this Article, the salvation of those whom God mercifully elects in Christ depends entirely upon God's gracious purpose of election, and not upon any human merit or achievement.**

Only God saves, and he does so out of his undeserved love and free decision to grant his people salvation in Christ—and that “before the foundation of the world”!

**Contrary to the consensus of the Reformed churches, Arminius argued for what is most aptly described as a doctrine of “conditional election.”** In his Declaration of Sentiments, Arminius summarized his teaching by distinguishing four decrees within God's eternal mind and will.

Though Arminius formulated these four decrees in a highly “scholastic” and theological manner, his position can be simply stated in four points:

*First, God eternally and absolutely wills to save all fallen sinners, and therefore has decreed to appoint his Son Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Savior of all who are lost. The first and foundational decree of God expresses his universal and gracious intention to save all fallen sinners without exception upon the basis of Christ's atoning work.*

*Second, God eternally and absolutely wills to receive into favor all fallen sinners who repent and believe, and to leave under his wrath all who remain impenitent and unbelieving. Though God eternally and absolutely wills the salvation of all, he also wills to save only those who choose to believe and persevere in believing and to damn those who choose to remain in their sin and unbelief.*

*Third, God eternally wills to appoint the means by which fallen sinners are able to come to faith and repentance. These means include the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who uses the Word and sacraments to invite fallen sinners to respond to the gospel in the way of faith and repentance. The actual salvation of fallen sinners depends upon their willingness to meet the “conditions” of the gospel invitation.*

*And fourth, God eternally decrees to save those particular persons whom he foreknows will believe and persevere in believing in response to the gospel; and he eternally decrees to damn those whom he foreknows will choose not to believe and persevere in believing. The election and actual salvation of some fallen sinners rests upon God's foreknowledge of their free choice to believe and to persevere in faith.*

**Arminius' fourth point clearly draws out the implications of the preceding three points for the doctrine of election. Though God wills absolutely and antecedently to save all fallen sinners, he wills relatively and**

***consequently to save only those particular persons whom he foreknows would believe and to damn those whom he foreknows would not.***

The basis for God's decree to save and damn "certain particular persons" is his foreknowledge of the way these persons freely (independently) choose to respond to the gospel call. ***(According to Arminius) the ultimate condition and ground for the actual salvation of sinners rests upon the free choice of some to believe and to persevere in faith.***

***On the one hand, God's universal will and intention to save all fallen sinners is frustrated or thwarted*** in the case of all those who persistently refuse to respond in faith to the invitation of the gospel. ***And on the other hand, God's decision to save the elect is dependent upon, or in consequence of, their choice to believe and to persevere in doing so.***

### **The Reformed Doctrine of Unconditional Election**

***In the first main point of doctrine, which sets forth the doctrine of unconditional election in opposition to Arminius' teaching, the Canons begin with several articles that summarize the key themes of the biblical gospel.*** These include the fact that "all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death" (Art 1), that God has manifested his love in the sending of his only-begotten Son (Art. 2), and that God's displeasure continues to rest upon those who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (Art.3).

Within the framework of these truths—all have sinned and are worthy of death, God in love sent his Son to redeem fallen sinners, such sinners must believe in Christ to be saved—the authors of the Canons raise the fundamental question to which the biblical doctrine of election is addressed: ***why do some believe and repent at the preaching of the gospel, but others remain in their sins and under the just condemnation of God? The answer to this question at its deepest level is God's unconditional election in Christ of some persons to salvation:***

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from [God's] eternal decision. For all his works are known to God from eternity (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us his act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. (**Article 6**)

***Election is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following: Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the good pleasure of his will, he chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin.***

***Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. (Art. 7)***

***Because this sovereign and gracious purpose of God in the election of his people is the source and basis of faith, the Canons go on to assert that it cannot therefore be based upon faith:*** “This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on” (Art. 8).

After articulating the Scriptural teaching of unconditional election, the Canons further affirm that this sovereign and gracious election of a particular number of persons unto salvation means that some sinners have been “passed by” and “left” in their sins (Art. 15). The formulation of the Canons is expressly “infralapsarian.” ***Those whom God does not elect to save in Christ belong to the company of all fallen sinners who “by their own fault” have willfully plunged themselves into a “common misery.”***

The language of this article ascribes reprobation to God’s good pleasure or will in a way that is clearly distinguished from his will to save the elect. Whatever parallel may exist between God’s merciful election and just reprobation, there is a profound asymmetry between them. ***In the case of the elect, God mercifully and graciously elects to grant them salvation in and through the work of Christ. In the case of the reprobate, God demonstrates his justice by choosing to withhold his grace and to finally condemn them for their sins and unbelief.***

## **Conclusion**

***The teaching of unconditional election glorifies God by acknowledging that salvation is rooted in his eternal, immutable, and merciful decision in Christ to save his people. The Triune God is the God of our salvation.*** By contrast, the Arminian teaching of conditional election bases the salvation of sinners upon their own independent action. But Dort also comforts believers by reminding them that the proclamation of the gospel will unfailingly achieve its purpose—the salvation of undeserving sinners from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. God’s gracious purpose of election will not be frustrated. And those whom the Father gives to Christ will never be snatched from his hand (John 10:28).

<https://credomag.com/article/the-first-main-point-of-doctrine-unconditional-election/>

## Scripture on Unconditional Election (Ephesians 1:3-14)

- **Note the provisions of the Father for our salvation in Ephesians 1:3-6. The Father has...**

**Blessed us (1:3)** <sup>3</sup> 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

**Chosen us (1:4)** <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him....

**The Source-** God chose us  
See also..

**2 Thessalonians 2:13,14** <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**2 Timothy 1:8-10** <sup>8</sup> Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, <sup>9</sup> 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

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31** <sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; <sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God. <sup>30</sup> But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

**1 Thessalonians 1:2-4** <sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention *of you* in our prayers; <sup>3</sup> constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, <sup>4</sup> knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you

**Acts 13:48** <sup>48</sup> 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.



***The sphere-*** In Christ

***The “time”-*** Before the foundation of the world

***The purpose-*** That we should be holy and blameless before Him

**Predestined us (1:5,6)** <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved

- ***The Son has...***

**Redeemed us (1:7a)** <sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood

See also 1 Peter 1:18,19 <sup>8</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

**Forgiven us (1:7b)** the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us.

**Enlightened us (1:8-10)** In all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him <sup>10</sup> with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

**Provided an inheritance for us (1:11,12)** <sup>11</sup> also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, <sup>12</sup> to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

- ***And the Holy Spirit..***

**Seals us (1:13)** <sup>13</sup> In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise

**Guarantees our destiny (1:14)** <sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God’s own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

Courtesy of Pastor Jerry Marshall, New Community Church

## Appendix...Herman Hanko on Unconditional Election (Excerpts)

### I. What Is Meant By Unconditional Election?

Before we proceed to define what is meant by unconditional election, it is important to recall briefly the history of this truth in the church. ***We are generally accustomed to trace this truth of unconditional election back to the Calvin Reformation.***

***And yet it was not Calvin who was the first to develop this truth. But, just as with the truth of total depravity, so also with this truth, St. Augustine, who lived more than a millennium ago in the Fifth Century A.D., was the first to speak of it. If we consider this a moment, this is not surprising. Augustine took the position that man is totally depraved. By this he meant that man is incapable of doing any good.***

And, most emphatically, that ***man is incapable of doing anything which would contribute to his salvation. In answer, therefore, to the question of how men are saved, Augustine answered that the power of salvation is to be found only in the power of sovereign, unmerited grace. There is no other power of salvation but that.*** But immediately the question arises: if the power of salvation is the power of sovereign, unmerited grace, not dependent in any respect upon man, ***how is it then that some men are saved and others are not? The answer to that question Augustine found in the decree of election and reprobation. He developed this truth therefore as part of his answer to the error of Pelagianism.***

Sad to say, this truth was never officially accepted by the Roman Catholic Church in the form which Augustine gave to it. Even though Rome honors Augustine as a church father, his doctrines were soon lost. In the dreary ages between Augustine and John Calvin there could be found only very few who maintained this truth with the emphasis that Augustine placed upon it. One such man was Gottschalk, a German theologian, who, having read Augustine, became convinced of the truth of sovereign predestination. But he was imprisoned for teaching it and paid the ultimate price of a martyr's death, rotting in some foul dungeon in France, sentenced there by the Church.

***It was not therefore until the time of the Protestant Reformation that the truth of sovereign predestination was brought to the fore.*** Luther believed it, maintained it, and taught it with emphasis. But Luther never made it an integral part of his theology. Luther's chief concern was the truth of justification by faith; and he never developed this truth of sovereign predestination in all its Scriptural emphases.

This work was done by John Calvin. And, indeed, ***if there was one reason why Calvin was hated it was because he maintained so unswervingly the truth of unconditional election.***

This truth therefore became an important part of the confession of all the churches which follow the theology of the reformer of Geneva. The truth of unconditional election is incorporated into the Confessions of all the Reformed and Calvinistic Churches not only in Europe, but also in this country.

***It was in the latter part of the century of the Reformation and the early part of the 17th Century that this truth was attacked by Arminius. He was professor of theology in the Reformed University of Leyden, had studied in Geneva at the Academy; but nevertheless openly repudiated the truth of predestination. But, as so often happens when heresy is introduced into the church of Christ, so in this case also, Arminius and those who supported him attempted to bring their teaching into the church under the banner of the Reformed faith.*** They tried to pass off their heresy as the teaching of Scripture, claiming that this ought to be the confession of the Reformed Churches. But our fathers would have none of this and pointed out in no uncertain language that the conditional election of the Arminians was not the truth of Scripture nor the heritage of the Calvinistic and Reformed Reformation.

***It is not difficult to understand why the Arminians taught conditional election. They did not believe in total depravity to begin with. They wanted to preserve in man the freedom of his will -- the power of man's will to choose for the good, to accept the offer of the gospel. It was their contention that God on His part loved all men, that hatred and wrath were foreign to God's nature; that it was God's intention and desire to save all men; that, therefore, God made salvation available and obtainable to all men through the universal atonement -- a universal cross on which Christ died for the sins of every man.*** But it is clear that in such a system as that proposed by the Arminians, there is no room at all for unconditional election. While therefore, the Arminians wanted to retain Reformed and Scriptural language and speak of election, they cut the heart out of this important and beautiful truth by insisting that election is conditional. ***God elects those whom He knows will believe, the Arminians said.*** God elects those whom He knows will accept the gospel which is offered to them. God elects those whom He knows will, by an act of their will, accept the gospel and who will also persevere in that acceptance of the gospel and keep that faith which once they exercised. Election is based upon this work of man.

But it was precisely this description of the truth of election which our fathers strenuously opposed. They saw it, not as a minor point, not as an insignificant detail of the truth for which there was room in the Reformed Churches. They saw it as a threat to the truth, as a teaching which cut the heart out of the whole truth of God's Word. They saw that it destroyed the truth of God's work of salvation as taught in Scripture. And they insisted therefore, that election is unconditional.

What is meant by election? There are several words used in Scripture to define this truth. The word "election" itself is used in Romans 9:11:

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; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

The other two words - "to foreknow" and "to predestinate" are both used in 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. 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.

***When the Scriptures speak of election it is evident that this refers to the counsel of God.*** In Eph. 1 the apostle Paul describes election in these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him . . . having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: . . . In whom (Christ) 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. (vss. 3, 4, 9.11.)

If, therefore, we are to understand the truth of election, we must discuss briefly the truth of the counsel of God. There is no room to discuss this important truth in detail, but some remarks must be made.

In the first place, it is important to notice that God's counsel cannot be compared with a plan - as so often it is. We speak of God's counsel as a plan; but it is possible that when we use this terminology we have in our minds something like the plan of an architect who makes a drawing of a proposed building. God's counsel is not that kind of plan. It is not written on a piece of paper and filed away somewhere in heaven. Nor is God's counsel even some kind of plan which is similar to a proposed course of action which we have in our minds. If we intend to go on a trip, e.g., we make our plans for that trip. But this is not the way we must consider the counsel of God. Rather, God's counsel is His own living will. It is the living will of the God of heaven and earth. That is a fundamental truth from which all the rest of the truth of God's counsel necessarily follows. To deny this truth is really to deny the counsel of God altogether.

In the second place, God's counsel is eternal. The will of God is the will of the eternal God. If God is eternal and His will is eternal, His counsel is equally eternal. This means, in brief, that God is never without His counsel. The creation and the world have a

beginning. God does not. He is above time, untouched by time's passing moments, dwelling in the serenity of eternity. What is true of God is true of His counsel.

In the third place, because God's counsel is His living will, God's counsel is also absolutely unchangeable. "I am Jehovah," the prophet Malachi informs Israel, "I change not. Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Mal. 3:6) The unchangeableness of God's own being is also the unchangeableness of His eternal counsel. There is nothing which can alter His counsel; nothing which can force God to revise it in any respect; nothing which can introduce into God's counsel alteration or amendment. It is eternal and unchangeable. We use the expression sometimes: "Prayer changes things." It is not clear what is meant by this vague and ambiguous expression. But if the meaning is that by means of our prayers the will and counsel of God is altered, that He does not do what He originally determined to do, then this expression must be condemned. There is nothing which can or does change the counsel of God.

In the fourth place, because that counsel of God is His living will, it is sovereignly efficacious. All that God has determined to do in His counsel will also be done. No power can frustrate it. All power belongs to God. No contingencies of life can prevent it from being realized. Everything that God has determined to do in His eternal and unchangeable counsel will certainly come to pass with absolute precision as He has determined it before the foundations of the world.

In the fifth place, the purpose of God's counsel -- the reason why He made His counsel, is the glory of his own name. God determined to glorify Himself. Not because He needed this glory to make His life as He lives it in Himself perfect. Not because His glory is incomplete. Not because, in any respect, the things which He determined to do in His counsel will make His glory richer and fuller than it is. But simply because He chose to reveal the glory of His own being in order that His glory might be acknowledged. All that God does, therefore, is determined by God's glory which He seeks.

***But God, according to the Scriptures, desires to glorify Himself through Christ. This is the whole thrust of that beautiful passage in Ephesians 1 which speaks of election. God determines to make His glory known - but through Christ.*** That is, through Christ as He is born of a virgin and lived among us; through Christ as He suffers and dies on the cross; through Christ as He rises in power and glory from the dead; through Christ as He is exalted in the highest heavens; through Christ as He shall come again at the end of time to establish the everlasting kingdom of righteousness; through that Christ God reveals all the glory of His own divine being. Christ is the fullness of the revelation of the glory of God.

It is this which brings us to the heart of our subject because just as soon as we say "Christ," we also say "the elect." There is no Christ apart from the elect. He was born in Bethlehem, but He came into our flesh. He died on the cross in the place of His people to satisfy the justice of God which demanded punishment for sin. He arose again from the grave of His people to conquer death on their behalf. He is in heaven at God's right hand to pray for His people and to prepare all things that His people may come to Him in everlasting glory.

And ***all this is true because the elect are chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. God, inasmuch as He determines to glorify Himself in Christ, determines to glorify Himself in an elect people whom He chooses in Christ and who are destined to dwell with Christ forever in everlasting life.***

This is the truth of God's counsel. All that we have said concerning God's counsel, therefore, must equally be said concerning predestination -- both election and reprobation.

***Election is, therefore, that decree of God which He eternally makes, by which, with sovereign freedom, He chooses to Himself a people, upon whom He determines to set His love, whom He rescues from sin and death through Jesus Christ, unto Himself in everlasting glory.***

This election is ***sovereign*** - God's sovereign and free choice. This election is ***eternal*** even as God's counsel is eternal. This election is ***unchangeable*** even as God's counsel is unchangeable. This election is ***efficacious*** so that the decree of election itself is, through Christ, the power by which the elect are actually saved.

***Election is therefore definite and particular.*** Perhaps this needs emphasis. There are some who maintain that election is a general choice on the part of God so that He only decides to save some people. But just exactly who those people are whom God has decided to save is not decided by the decree of election. This is, once again, the old familiar Arminian ploy. It is only decided that God will save some; but precisely whom He will save is decided on the basis of what man himself will do with the offer of the gospel. This is not election - either of Scripture or the Reformed heritage. God knows His own from before the foundation of the world and chooses them, knowing their names and penning their names on the pages of the Book of Life. So that each one stands before God's mind and heart eternally as the object of His love.

Now this election is unconditional. We believe in unconditional election. And it is this truth of unconditional election which must be maintained because it stands over against the Arminian heresy which teaches that election is conditional...

But however this may be, it is the truth of unconditional election which we must maintain. ***What does this mean?***

***First of all (and negatively) this means that in the decrees of election God chose not according to anything found in man. He did not base His choice on man in any way. Not on man's goodness, works, faith, holiness; not on man's faithfulness to the gospel. There could not be found in man any good thing. It was a free choice, a sovereign choice of God.*** He made it without any consideration of man whatsoever. The apostle Paul expresses this in Romans 9:10-13. Paul is speaking of Jacob and Esau -- children of Isaac and Rebecca. He writes:

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (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;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

This same truth was expressed...when Israel was brought to the borders of Canaan. God told Israel through Moses:

The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut. 7:7.8.)

The choice of God was not because Israel had any distinctive traits about her which set her apart from the other nations. The only reason why God chose Israel was because God loved her. His choice was free and sovereign.

***Secondly, and positively, that election is based solely upon God's good pleasure.*** In Ephesians 1:4ff. the truth of this is set forth.

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: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will.

***This is the only basis for election. God chose those whom He chose because it seemed good to Him to do it. It was His good pleasure. It was the good pleasure of His own eternal and unchangeable will. It was His because He had determined to glorify Himself in His own way through a people whom He would choose.***

***Thirdly, this means that all the blessings of salvation flow forth from the decree of election. We are not chosen because we believe, but rather because God is pleased to choose us. And faith and perseverance in faith are blessings which come to us through election.*** Election is the fountain of every good work. Our Canons (quite expectedly) emphasize this very strongly.

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree. . . . (1, 6.)

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause or condition on which it depended, but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc., therefore ***election is the fountain of every saving good*** from which

proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects . . . . (I, 9.)

### **What Are The Denials Of This Truth?**

...In the first place there is a class of objections against this doctrine which contains charges against God Himself. The objection is raised that predestination makes God a tyrant, the author of sin, a capricious dictator who arbitrarily chooses some and rejects others. They are similar to the objections which Paul considered in Romans 9:14, 19:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

They are objections lodged against God and His justice.

The other class of objections all come down to the one charge of fatalism. It is said that the truth of predestination is fatalistic... These objections mean to say that the truth of predestination makes of men careless and profane sinners. The doctrine arouses in men the statement: "Let us sin that grace may abound." The doctrine forces men to say: "If I'm an elect, I am going to heaven no matter what I do - even though I sin greatly. So I shall have a good time in this life, for my sin cannot alter my election. And, on the other hand, if I am not an elect, I will not go to heaven no matter how good a life I live. Hence I shall surely go to hell if I am reprobate even though I live holily. So I might just as well enjoy life, sin as much as possible. Nothing can alter God's eternal determination." So, it is said, the doctrine of predestination destroys man's responsibility and accountability, and makes of him a stock and a block.

All these objections are very old. What shall we answer?

In the first place, in general, there are times when these questions are raised by sincere people of God. They are not raised in order to make mockery of the truth; but rather because the people of God want to understand the truth as clearly as they are able. And then these questions are perfectly legitimate...

In the second place, we must be prepared to admit that this truth is very profound. There are indeed questions which will arise in our minds which we shall be unable to answer. Calvin, for example, reminds us again and again that we must limit ourselves to what Scripture says and not permit ourselves to wander beyond the paths in which Scripture leads us. Where Scripture tells us to stop, there we must stop. And, if at that stopping point, there are still questions that are unanswered, so be it; we bow in humility before the truth of the Word of God. However, this truth is sometimes used to deny the truth of predestination in a very subtle way and to block the investigation of this truth altogether. And so it must be emphasized that although we may not go into paths where Scripture does not lead us, we must follow where Scripture takes us by the hand and shows us the glory of this work of God. When Scripture puts this confession on our lips, this confession must be ours.



In the third place, ***with respect to the first class of objections (charging God with capriciousness and making Him the author of sin) we can do no better than quote the answer of Paul to similar objections:***

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 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. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? (***Romans 9:14-21***)

That is the answer of Scripture; that must be our answer too.

Finally, with respect to charges of fatalism, every child of God knows in his heart that they are not true. The history of the Reformed Churches is abundant testimony that it is not true. Is not this history written in the blood of martyrs who loved not their lives unto death because they believed and confessed the truth of eternal election? Is there not a long gallery of heroes of faith who loved this truth and confessed it and whose lives are a testimony of the power of God's grace in their hearts?

There is reason for this. For ***the truth of election not only means that God chooses those who are to be His people; and it not only means that God determines that they shall live in heaven; but it means also that God guarantees a walk of holiness for His people in the midst of the world. The decree of election is the foundation of all the blessings of salvation.*** Election was realized on Calvary. And on Calvary all of salvation was accomplished. That same salvation is applied to the hearts of God's elect people by sovereign grace. This is the point our Canons make again and again.

There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those, who shall be saved, both under the Old and New Testament: since the scripture declares the good pleasure, purpose and counsel of the divine will to be one, according to which he hath chosen us from eternity, both to grace and glory, to salvation and the way of salvation, which he hath ordained that we should walk therein. (1, 8; italics added.) Cf. also 1. 6, 9, quoted above.

Election is the fountain of an innumerable host of blessings which flow to God's people. By the power of this election they walk as God's people in the midst of the world. Careless and profane Christians? No. Elect, redeemed in the blood of the cross and sanctified by the power of sovereign grace.

...We can do no better than to close this discussion with the words Paul uses to close his discussion of this truth. They are found in Romans 11:33-36:

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! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.

<https://www.prca.org/fivepoints/chapter2.html>

## **Appendix...The Doctrine of Election and Evangelistic Zeal (Excerpts)**

Charles Spurgeon tenaciously held to the doctrine of unconditional election. By necessity, this biblical truth flows from belief in human depravity. Because the will of man is utterly dead and cannot choose God, God must exercise His sovereign will to save. Out of the mass of fallen humanity, God made an eternal, distinguishing choice. Before the foundation of the world, He determined whom He would save. Spurgeon contended that were it not for God's choice of His elect, none would be saved.

***He that perishes chooses to perish; but he that is saved is saved because God has chosen to save him.*** —Spurgeon

Like all the doctrines that Spurgeon held, he believed this truth because he was convinced it is rooted and grounded in the Bible: "Whatever may be said about the doctrine of election, it is written in the Word of God as with an iron pen, and there is no getting rid of it." In his sermon titled "Election," preached on September 2, 1855, Spurgeon read many passages that unmistakably teach this doctrinal truth. Among the texts he cited and explained were Luke 18:7; John 15:16; 17:8-9; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29, 33; 9:11-13; 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; Ephesians 1:14; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1-2; and 2 John 1. In this exposition, Spurgeon stated:

In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being—when the ether was not fanned by an angel's wing, when space itself had not an existence, when there was nothing save God alone—even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul.

Spurgeon further asserted, "God from the beginning chose His people...In eternity past, God sovereignly set His affections on a particular people and predestined their salvation. Moreover, sovereign election, Spurgeon affirmed, was based not on divine foresight but on divine foreordination: "'But,' say others, 'God elected them on the

foresight of their faith.' Now, God gives faith, therefore He could not have elected them on account of faith which He foresaw."

Spurgeon further denied that election can be dismissed as the choice of nations rather than individuals.:

It is the most miserable shift on earth to make out that God hath not chosen persons but nations. . . .If it were not just to choose a person, it would be far more unjust to choose a nation, since nations are but the union of multitudes of persons, and to chose a nation seems to be a more gigantic crime—if election be a crime—than to chose one person. Surely, to choose ten thousand would be considered to be worse than choosing one; to distinguish a whole nation from the rest of mankind, does seem to be a greater extravaganza in the acts of divine sovereignty than the election of one poor mortal, and leaving out another.

Because God's sovereign election of individual sinners is clearly taught by Scripture... Spurgeon maintained that withholding this great truth is a grievous offense against God:

Some of you have never preached on election since you were ordained. "These things," you say, "are offensive." And so you would rather offend God than offend man. But you reply, "These things will not be practical." I do think that the climax of all man's blasphemy is centered in that utterance. Tell me that God put a thing in the Bible that I am not to preach! You are finding fault with my God. But you say, "It will be dangerous." What! God's truth dangerous? I should not like to stand in your shoes when you have to face your Maker on the day of judgment after such an utterance as that.

From a positive perspective, Spurgeon boldly declared that preaching unconditional election is evangelistic. He said, "I have never preached this doctrine without seeing conversions, and I believe I never shall." When people asked him how he reconciled preaching election with extending the gospel, he asserted, "There is no need to reconcile them, for they have never yet quarreled with one another." He was right. Divine sovereignty and gospel evangelism go hand in hand, the former preparing the way for and ensuring the success of the latter.

While all in heaven are there by God's choice, Spurgeon said, those in hell are there by their own choice. He testified: "From the Word of God I gather that damnation is all of man, from top to bottom, and salvation is all of grace, from first to last. He that perishes chooses to perish; but he that is saved is saved because God has chosen to save him." In other words, salvation is possible only when God's will liberates the human will from its bondage.

<https://www.ligonier.org/posts/charles-spurgeon-calvinism-unconditional-election>