

Subject: *The Biblical Teaching of Election*

Scripture: *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10*

One reason why I am preaching on this subject is because election is a biblical truth and we need to know what the Bible teaches. A second reason is that it has become a hot topic in the church and I know firsthand that there is a lot of misinformation about it, and that should drive us to know the truth. When we studied this in our King's Academy class in 2020, some people saw this in a very positive light, but others had a different attitude toward it. The instructor in our video lessons, Dr. R. C. Sproul, gave a word of caution in the first lesson that Christians should approach the doctrine of election with care and humility. He said that people often disagreed on this doctrine, so we need to be considerate and patient toward others who may struggle with it.

1. Election is clearly taught in Scripture

The doctrine of election is a clear biblical teaching. The word election or some form of it is found in many places and there is no doubt about what it means. The issue is whether we will be diligent to study what the Bible says and willing to accept what it teaches.

One thing we should be aware of as we begin to look at this is our tendency to believe what we have always thought instead of what the Bible has always taught. Traditional ideas and personal opinions can sometimes be wrong and conflict with what the Bible teaches. Then we are left with the choice as to whether we will hold on to our ideas or believe what the Bible says. If the Bible teaches it, that settles it.

First, let's consider the word election and other related words and where they are found in the Bible. Election is mentioned a lot in Scripture, and not just in one or two isolated texts.

The word election means choosing. Specifically it means a group of people or an individual chosen by God. This idea of God's choosing is mentioned five different ways:

A. God chose the nation Israel

Isaiah 45:4 *For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.*

B. God chose Christ to be Lord and Savior

1 Peter 2:6 *Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious...*

C. God chose the holy angels

1 Timothy 5:21 *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels...*

D. God chose the apostles

John 15:16 *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

E. God chose His people in Christ

1 Thessalonians 1:4 *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

1 Peter 2:9 *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood...*

God's people are described as: chosen, elect, foreknown, predestined, and called. Election means that God chooses some people and not others. When God chooses some people that means He doesn't choose all people. He chose one nation (Israel) not all nations. He chose Christ and no one else. He chose the holy angels and not all angels. He chose the apostles, not all men. He chose believers in Christ, not others.

Here is the definition of Wayne Grudem: "Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure." Here is another statement from R. C. Sproul: "From all eternity, before we even existed, God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. God made a choice—He chose some individuals to be saved into everlasting blessedness in heaven and others He chose to pass over, to allow them to follow the consequences of their sins into eternal torment in hell."

Election is based on God's sovereignty (control). God does what He wants, when He wants, how He wants, and with whom He wants. Everything God does is right because He does it. Everything He does is wise and loving because He does it. God does not save all sinners, but He saves some. He chooses to have mercy on some, and others receive justice. He is not obligated to save anybody. To some that seems unfair. God doesn't do what is fair. He does what is merciful. If God was completely fair He would send everybody to hell.

2. Election is confidently declared in church history

Some of the great leaders and theologians of the church have believed and defended the doctrine of election: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Spurgeon, and in our day, J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, John Piper, Steven Lawson, and Paul Washer. Many of the founding fathers of the Southern Baptist Convention (1845) were strong defenders of election: W. B. Johnson; R. B. C. Howell, Richard Fuller, John Dagg, and P. H. Mell.

All of the great confessions of faith have clear and strong statements about election.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

The London Baptist Confession (1689)

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833)

The Baptist Faith and Message (1925, revised 1963)

The Holston Baptist Confession of Faith (1786)

Just because many churches and Christian leaders strongly believed in election and defended this doctrine doesn't make it true, but it should make us stop and think before we reject it or dismiss it. Some people today reject the doctrine of election and even call it heresy. Do we think our Christian forefathers were heretics or did they stand for the truth? If election is heresy now, then it was heresy then, but if election was truth then, it is still truth today because truth doesn't change.

3. Election is graciously applied to God's people

Look at how this is described in 1 Thessalonians 1. Paul mentions their election of God in verse 4, but he also refers to their faith, love, and hope (vs. 3). He refers to the gospel coming

to them in power (vs. 5) and how they received the word in much affliction (vs. 6). He writes about their good example (vs. 7), their faith (vs. 8), and conversion to God and service (vs. 9), and their waiting for Christ's return (vs. 10). They were first chosen by God eternity and then they were saved by God in time.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 *But we are bound to give thanks always 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.*

God's work of election (His choosing) takes place in eternity past, but it is applied to believers in time. Spurgeon said: "I'm glad God chose me before I was born because I know He would never have chosen me after I was born."

Ephesians 1:3-4 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.*

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.*

The foreknowledge of God doesn't mean that He knew ahead of time who would believe in Christ. It means that God planned it as part of His purpose. The word translated "foreknowledge" (1 Peter 1:2) is the same word translated "foreordained" of Christ's death on the cross (1 Peter 1:20).

Acts 15:18 *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

All of God's works are known unto Him before the world was created. Just think of all His works that He does throughout human history: creation, salvation, and judgment. How does he know everything is going to happen just like He planned? He knows everything will take place because He's in control of everything. He is sure of the future because He is sovereign over the future. Salvation is God's work from beginning to end, from start to finish. The Father planned our salvation. The Son of God purchased our salvation. The Holy Spirit applies salvation. All of this is God's work.

Philippians 1:6 *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

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.*

How can a person know that he or she is one of God's elect or chosen people? The simple answer is that you will know that God has chosen you only when you repent and believe the Gospel. Our responsibility under God is not to try and figure out if we are one of God's elect. Our responsibility is to obey God's command to repent and believe in Christ. Only God's

chosen people will respond to God's command to repent and obey the gospel. No man will choose God on his own.

Romans 3:11 *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

Isaiah 53:6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way...*

People have a will and they make choices. They choose what they want to do. The problem is that sinners, if left to themselves, have no desire for God and they will not choose to obey the gospel unless God gives them a new heart and a new birth.

How can a person be sure that God has chosen him? We need to know.

2 Peter 1:10 *Wherefore, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure...*

Donald Barnhouse: "We don't know who the elect are. The only way we know the elect is through their response to the gospel and their living the Christian life that follows that call."

The Bible teaches that God is sovereign in choosing us and working in our hearts for salvation, but it also teaches that we are responsible to turn from our sin and trust Christ as Lord and Savior. Someone asked Charles Spurgeon, "How do you reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?" He said, "I never need to reconcile friends." We don't believe in one and deny the other. We believe both: God's sovereign election and man's personal responsibility.

Once we are saved and begin to read and study our Bible we understand that we chose Christ only because God first chose us. We love him because He first loved us. We did not first seek Christ, but He first sought us. Election glorifies God and it humbles us.