

## ANOTHER LOOK AT ELECTION:

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*“God is too good to be unkind and too wise to make mistakes.”*

~ Robert P. Lightner

Election! Election! Election! This word offers a number of responses and emotions. There are many who want to disregard it because it distasteful; the mere idea that God would select some unto Himself unto salvation is counter-intuitive. Then there are those who disregard election because it seems to make God unjust and unloving. Then there are those who disregard election altogether stating that everything about our salvation began when we made our decision to trust Jesus Christ as Savior. And finally there are people who contend that we should even avoid discussing “*election*” because Christians have been debating this issue for hundreds of years and it causes divisions among the brethren; it is a mystery that cannot be solved until we see Him face-to-face in heaven. Therefore, why talk about it?

While election is mysterious from a human standpoint, God has given us information in Scripture which states that the doctrine of election is a biblical fact. Therefore, in this presentation I will summarize those facts with a particular emphasis of election as applied to believers. My conclusion is that while we don’t necessarily understand why some are chosen and brought to faith in Christ and others are not, we know that God’s plan is the best possible plan to bring the most possible glory now and eternally to His name because He cannot do anything less than His infinite-perfect best. As Lewis S. Chafer, the founding president of Dallas Theological Seminary states:

There is no doubt whatever about the Bible teaching that God has chosen an elect people; but the contemplation of all that is involved in this truth reaches out into the realms of existence that can be known only to God, far removed as they are from the human sphere of understanding. Being thus limited, it ill becomes the earth dweller to sit in judgment on God respecting divine election. God’s essential character has been disclosed and He can be trusted where men cannot possibly understand. He is infinitely wise, infinitely holy, and infinitely just and good. When exercising His sovereign right in election, He does not transgress His character or deny Himself. Since He does elect some for special glories and destinies and since He proves infinitely right in all He does, it follows that His eternal elective purpose must be righteous as He is righteous.<sup>1</sup>

We will begin by examining the Greek word for “*election*” and survey evangelical definitions on the term “*election*.” (I). We will then proceed to see how this word is used in Scripture (II). We will then examine theological definitions of election across evangelical camps, whether Baptist, Reformed, or dispensational. (III). We will then proceed to examine how “*election*” is used in Scripture. We will then conclude by asking ourselves how we should live in view of election (IV).

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 volumes (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 1: 133.

## I. What does the Greek word “election” mean?

In this section we will summarize the classical usage, LXX usage, *Koine* usage, and N.T. usage of the word, “*election*.”

### CLASSICAL GREEK USAGE:

- A. The classical Greek word for “*election*” is “ἐκλεκτός” which is used primarily in two ways: (1) “*pick out*,” or “*be chosen*,” or “*select*”; (2) to “*levy taxes*” or “*tribute*.”<sup>2</sup>
- B. Regarding the first usage:
  - 1. **Active voice:** the word election means to “*pick*” or “*single out*,” especially used of rulers, oarsmen, and soldiers. Use of active voice may be illustrated this way, “I went to the store.”
  - 2. **Passive voice:** the word means “*to be selected*” or “*chosen*.” Use of passive voice may be illustrated this way, “I was taken to the store.”
  - 3. **Middle voice:** means “*to pick out for oneself*,” “*choose*,” or “*select*,” for example, “*selectively ‘to pick or pull out one’s gray hairs.*” As Ryrie states, “When Paul uses the verb, he uses it in middle voice, indicating that God’s choice was made freely and for His own purposes (1 Cor. 1:27-28; Eph. 1:4).”<sup>3</sup>
- C. The second usage of “*election*” is very infrequent and makes no sense in the context of passages like Ephesians 1:4.

### LXX USAGE: ἐκλέγομαι

- D. 1. In the LXX the word “*elect*” occurs 139 times and appears 125 times in the canonical O.T. books.
- 2. The Hebrew and Greek meaning is essentially the same whereby the Hebrew word conveys the idea of a “*carefully, conceived choice*.” For example:
  - a. David’s selection of stones for his sling (1 Sam. 17:40);
  - b. God’s choice of a people (Deut. 7:6-7; 1 Kings 3:8);
  - c. A place for his name (Deut. 12:5; 1 Kings 8:16-17);

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Harold Hoehner’s *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 185-92.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Moody, 1986, 1999), 360.

- d. The selection of the priesthood (Num. 16:5, 7; 17:5; Deut. 18:5);
  - e. The choice of a king (1 Sam. 10:24; 2 Sam. 6:21; 1 Chr. 28:5).
3. Of the 172 times the Hebrew word is used, God is the subject ninety-five times (85 out of 109 times in the LXX).
  4. Three observations about the use of the word “*election*” in the O.T are offered by Greek scholar Harold Hoehner:

First, all the options are known before the choice is made. The following are a few examples. After Lot surveyed all the land, he decided to take the Jordan valley (Gen. 13:11). His decision was based on knowledge. After Moses presented options of life versus death and blessings versus curses, he asks the people to choose the way that leads to life for their descendants (Deut. 30:19). In the selection of Israel’s new king, David was chosen after Samuel had seen all of Jesse’s sons (1 Sam. 16:1-3 esp. vv. 11-13); 1 Chron. 28:4, 5). From among all the nations of the world, God chose Israel (Deut. 14:2). In the above instances the choice was not made in a vacuum but only after all the options are known. Second, in no case was the object or person not chosen spurned or regarded with dislike. Once again, the choice of David can be used as an illustration. When God chose David his brothers were rejected but not despised. So also with the selection of Israel. His choice did not signify that he hated the other nations. The same holds true in the selection of Levi for the priesthood (Deut. 18:5) and Judah for political leadership (1 Chron. 28:4; cf. Gen. 49:8). God did not despise the other tribes. Third, the choice is made because of the subject’s preference and not because the selected recipient had some legal claim on the subject. The sons of God chose wives who were beautiful (Gen. 6:2). Lot chose the land that was most favorable to him (13:11). God chose Israel because he loved them and not because he was obligated to them in some way (Deut. 7:6-8; 10:15). This shows that the subject has personal interest in his choice and it is neither random or an impulsive whim nor is it because he is indebted in some way to the object.<sup>4</sup>

5. In summary, the OT use of election implies that the (1) subject chose in view of knowing all known options; (2) the choice was made freely and not due to a dislike toward any other option or (3) because the object of choice had any legal claim on the one making the choice. The majority of the time God is the subject.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 185-86.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

## KOINE GREEK:

- E. *Koine* usage (300 BC-A.D. 550): we observe that there is substantial harmonious agreement of the meaning of election with both the classical and LXX usage. The basic meaning involves the following ideas:<sup>6</sup>
1. Careful selection out of known options;
  2. The subject can totally make a choice according to his or her own preferences;
  3. In the choosing that there is no dislike toward the options not selected.<sup>7</sup>
- F. N.T. Greek word for election is “*eklektos*” (ἐκλεκτός). The first part of the word “*ek*” means “*from*” and the remaining part of the word, “*lego*” means “*to gather, to pick out.*” Thus, this word literally means being “*chosen from,*” “*to gather,*” “*to pick out.*” Consider the following:
1. The verb form is used 22 times in N.T;
    - a. 11 times by Luke (Luke 6:13; 9:35; 10:42; 14:7; Acts 1:2, 24; 6:5; 13:17; 15:7, 22, 25);
    - b. 5 times in John (6:70; 13:18; 15:16-19)
    - c. 4 times in Paul (1 Cor. 1:27-28; Eph. 1:4),
    - d. Once by Mark (13:20)
    - e. Once by James (2:5).
  2. The verb is always an aorist middle with the possible exception of Luke 9:35 where it is textually difficult to determine; this passage may either be a middle or a passive perfect.
  3. Not one author used the present or perfect verb tense which would have defined more exactly the author’s conception of the action. Therefore, the context must determine the kind of action.
  4. Except for Luke 9:35, just as seen in classical and LXX, in every case a choice was made out of multiple known options.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>7</sup> Hoehner states that there is a court record of a father’s will, dated in Emperor Trajan’s rule (A.D. 98-117) that states that he had the right to choose one son as an appointed heir [Ibid., 186].

<sup>8</sup> (1) Jesus selected the twelve disciples out of all those who were following Him (Luke 6:13; John 13:18; 15:19), the church selected seven deacons out of all the number (Acts 6:5), (3) the Jerusalem Council chose Paul and Barnabas to go to Antioch to deliver the council’s decree (Acts 15:22), (4) God chose the foolish

5. At in OT there is no dislike toward the objects not chosen.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when God chooses individuals as his own, it does not mean that there is a dislike for those that were not chosen.
6. There is no indication that those who are chosen have some legal claim on God and thereby God was obligated to choose them. Thus, the act of choosing is one of grace and not one of debt.
7. The middle voice is always used with the Greek verb “*elect*” which indicates personal interest. In other words, the middle voice expresses the fact that the subject chooses with intense personal interest toward the object rather than an arbitrary random selection.<sup>10</sup> The significance is that in the middle voice the subject is acting in relation to himself [Robertson, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament*]. In fact, the only real difference between the active voice and the middle voice is that the middle voice emphasizes, calls special attention, or highlights an awareness of the subject as he personally chooses the object. Therefore, God draws attention to himself in view of having personal interest in choosing those for salvation. Stated a different way the middle voice expresses personal interest in God’s choice, implying that the believer s chosen for God’s own pleasure.
8. *Most frequently* God is the *subject* and in *all cases* it shows God’s grace in that He is the one who takes the initiative.

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of this world to shame the wise (1 Cor. 1:27-28), and (5) God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5) [Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 187].

<sup>9</sup> Hoehner states:

Jesus chose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:13), it does not imply that he spurned the other disciples. Even when God chose the foolish, weak, and nobodies of this world, to same respectively the wise, strong, and somebodies of this world (1 Cor. 1:27-28), the intent was not to despise the world but to show the world that one does not come to know God because of worldly status. As Schenk notes, the idea of reprobation is nowhere explicitly contrasted with God’s choosing. Therefore, when God chooses persons as his own, it does not mean that there is a dislike for the persons not chosen [Ibid., 187].

<sup>10</sup> Hoehner contents:

Moule observes that although the middle may have primarily denoted the reflexive idea for certain periods, it is not true for N.T. usage. Rather the middle ‘calls attention to the whole subject being concerned in the action.’ It shows personal interest. Two illustrations of this are Mary’s choice to hear Jesus rather than help Martha (Luke 10:42) and the people who chose places of honor at a marriage feast (14:7). On the other hand, the significance of the middle usage of ἐκλέγομαι should not be should not be pushed too far, because by NT times the word had become a deponent and the very act of choosing would have indicated personal interest. Nevertheless, it does have some significance, for this world was used instead of some other word that could have eliminated the personal interest aspect. It is noteworthy that in every context the personal interest is evident [*Ephesians*, 187].

9. Even though the aorist tense does not describe the action, when combined with the statement in Ephesians 1:4, “*before the foundation of this world,*” the aorist tense demonstrates that God chose in eternity past.
10. The noun “*election*” (*eklogē*) appears seven times in the New Testament.
11. The adjective “*elect*” (*eklektos*) (plural, *eklektoi*), six are in Paul’s writings.
12. Other related words to the doctrine of election include the following:
  - a. The verb “**to mark off beforehand** (*proorizein*)” which occurs six times, five of which are used by Paul;
  - b. The verb “**foreknow**” (*proginōskein*) which is used by Paul all five times;
  - c. “**call**” (*kalein*) and “**called**” (*klētos*);
  - d. “**to set before**” or “**to purpose**” (*protitēgmi*);
  - e. “**will**” (*thelēma*);
  - f. “**purpose**” (*boulē*), and
  - g. “**good pleasure**” (*eudokia*).
13. While election is an important theme in Pauline theology it is not unique to him. In fact, the doctrine of election is found in the Synoptic Gospels, John’s writings, Peter, James, and Acts (only in 13:48). For example, in the Synoptic Gospels “*election*” is expressed in Luke 18:7; Mark 13:20 and par.), and Mark 13:27 and par.).

F. Based upon our etymological and diachronic study of election beginning with classical Greek, LXX, Koine, and N.T. usage, we may make the following observations:<sup>11</sup>

- God is the one who chooses certain people for salvation.
- His choice of the individual for salvation is made in light of all known options, namely, the entire human race.
- There is no reference in context in any passage of dislike toward other human beings that prompted his choice or not choosing (reprobation; double predestination).

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<sup>11</sup> Hoehner, Ephesians, 187-88.

- The middle voice as used in every case except possibly Luke 9:35 demonstrate that God himself has personal interest in the choice He makes, namely, for His own glory.
- The whole action shows God’s grace taking the initiative for those to come to salvation.
- God freely chose the believer with undeserved favor and not because he was obligated to do so as if someone had a legal claim on God.
- Ephesians 4:1 explains *when* God chose us...in eternity past.

The conclusion from our diachronic study of “*election*” is that salvation, from God’s standpoint, is unconditional, efficacious, immutable, and loving:

1. **Election is unconditional:** election is not conditioned upon any foreseen faith or foreseen merit in us. In other words, election “does not depend upon man’s performing a specific action or meeting a certain condition or terms of God.”<sup>12</sup> As Chafer states, “In biblical usage the word ‘election’ designates a sovereign, divine purpose so formulated as to be independent of human merit, consent, or cooperation.”<sup>13</sup>

This is clearly reflected in passages such as Ephesians 1:4-5:

*“even as [the Father] chose us in [Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”*

2. **Election is efficacious:** Those whom God has elected unto salvation will most certainly come to faith in Jesus Christ.
3. **Election is immutable:** God does not change his mind about the people has He chosen.
4. **Election is loving:** Though election denotes a sovereign, divine purpose that is independent of human merit, consent, or cooperation, one reason why God chooses some and not others may possibly be found in Ephesians 1:5, “*He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ*”

Other passages that substantiate the above elements from God’s standpoint include John 6:37, 44, 65; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28-30, 9:15-16; Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:4-5.

#### G. Final Thoughts:

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<sup>12</sup> Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 917.

<sup>13</sup> Chafer, *Chafer Systematic Theology*, 112.

1. ***Is election arbitrary and unloving?*** Lest we think that God is arbitrary in choosing some unto salvation and not others, it is clear from Scripture, in passages like Ephesians 1:4-5, that God in eternity past chose a perfect plan. He is omniscient and knew all possible plans. Because He is the sum-total of infinite perfections, including being all-just and all-loving, He can only choose the best of all possible plans. Therefore, God is not random or impersonal in His choosing. As Paul states in 2 Timothy 1:9 God “*saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.*” And if one still thinks that unconditional election from God’s standpoint is unfair, consider reading Romans 9:20-24.
  
2. ***Is election temporal?*** Divine election which is an act of God is part of His eternal plan of the ages. This is affirmed in passages like Ephesians 1:4 “*according as he has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*” and 2 Timothy 1:9 whereby election is “*according to his own purposes and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*” Therefore, since God’s plan is eternal, election is also eternal.
  
3. ***Is faith really faith?*** While election is fixed from God’s perspective, salvation is conditioned from the human perspective; people must believe in order to receive it. This is affirmed in passages such as Acts 16:31; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9. Or as stated by Wayne Grudem:

We must affirm that the doctrine of election is fully able to accommodate the idea that we have a voluntary choice and we make willing decisions in accepting or rejecting Christ. Our choices are voluntary because they are what we want to do and what we decide to do. This does not mean that our choices are absolutely free, because, God can work sovereignly through our desires so that he guarantees that our choices come about as he has ordained, but this can still be understood as a real choice because God has created us to choose Christ voluntarily. The mistaken assumption underlying his objection is that a choice must be absolutely free (that is, not in anyway caused by God), in order for it to be a genuine human choice.

...someone might object that if a choice is caused by God, it may appear to us to be voluntary and willed by us but it is nonetheless not a genuine or real choice, because it is not absolutely free. Once again we must respond by challenging the assumption that a choice must be absolutely free in order to be genuine or valid. If God makes us in a certain way and then tells us that our voluntary choices are real and genuine choices, then we must agree that they are. God is the definition of what is real and genuine in the universe. By contrast, we might ask where Scripture ever says that our choices have to be free from God’s influence or control in order to be real or genuine choices. It does not seem that Scripture ever speaks in this way.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, while we affirm divine election as a biblical fact, we must conclude that the voluntary choice to believe is also biblical because when people rejected the God of the

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<sup>14</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 680-81.

Bible, the blame is on their willful choice to reject him, not God's decree. Consider the following passages:

Jesus states, "*Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires*" (John 8:34-35).

Jesus states, "*How often would I have gathered your children together...and you would not!*" (Matt. 23:37).

Jesus states to the Jews who rejected him, "You refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:40).

Romans 1 makes it plain that all people are confronted with general revelation from God of such clarity that the issue of His existence is not of ignorance, but suppression of the truth; everyone is "*without excuse.*"

The conclusion is that people who remain in unbelief do so because they are unwilling to come to the God of the Bible, and the blame for such unbelief always, always, and always lies with believers themselves, not with God. As Norman Geisler states:

Salvation originates with God, being based in a unconditional act of His boundless love and unmerited favor (grace). Nonetheless, once again, while there are no conditions for God's *giving* salvation, there is one condition for receiving it: faith.<sup>15</sup>

### III. Theological Definitions regarding Election:

Since there are scholars whose main ministry in life is the study and instruction in theological studies, it is valuable to glean upon their understanding what election means. Therefore, in this section we will review the term "*election*" as defined by leading evangelical theologians, whether Reformed, Baptist, or dispensational. The conclusion is that the term "*election*" is defined essentially same the way-even among different evangelical perspectives:

#### 1. Louis Berkhof:

"God's eternal purpose is to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Berkhof, *A Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933), 91. In his discussion of reprobation, Berkhof makes the following comment:

The doctrine of election naturally implies that some of the human race were not elected. If God purposed to save some, He also purposed not to save others. This is also in perfect agreement with the teachings of Scripture on this point, Matt. 11:25, 26, Rom. 9:13, 17, 18, 21, 23; 11:7; Jude

## 2. James Oliver Buswell:

The word 'election' simply indicates a choosing, a selection, and appointment....election in the Scripture frequently refers to God's eternal decree whereby He has chosen a people from among the sinful mass of humanity and has appointed them to obtain everlasting life through our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. Lewis S. Chafer:

In Biblical usage, the word election designates a sovereign divine purpose so formulated as to be independent of human merit, descent, or cooperation....The thought expressed in election cannot be modified. It asserts an express intention on the part of God to confer salvation on certain persons, but not all. It is not mere purpose to give salvation to those who may believe; it rather determines who will believe.<sup>18</sup>

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4; 1 Pet. 2:8. Reprobation may be defined as *that decree of God whereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operation of His special grace and to punish them for their sin to the manifestation of His justice* [92].

<sup>17</sup> James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 148-149.

<sup>18</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:167, 172. In the abridged edition, *Chafer Systematic Theology*, the following terms related to election are defined this way:

2. Chosen...the word chosen is a synonym for the word 'election.' Those elected of God are chosen by Him from all eternity, and the same term is applied to Israel (Isa. 44:1), the church (Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 2:9), and the apostles (John 6:70; 13:18; Acts 1:2).
3. Drawn. God draws those who are to be saved. 'But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself' (John 12:32). In 6:44 a similar revelation is given, 'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.'
4. Called. The calling of God is a divine activity in which unsaved men are drawn to God. The calling of God, though mentioned in many passages, is linked in Romans 8:30 to predestination, justification and glorification: 'And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.'
5. Divine Purpose. Election is according to divine purpose (Eph. 1:9; 3:11). It should be obvious that divine purpose and divine activity involve the same works of God.
6. Foreknowledge. Foreknowledge is another term indicating that God knows beforehand what is going to happen. It is used of Israel Rom. 11:2) and the church (8:29).
7. Foreordination and Predestination. These words are practically synonymous and declare that God determines what shall come to pass before it happens God's foreordination and predestination precede all history. As foreknowledge recognizes the certainty of future events, foreordination and predestination make those events sure. Events are not predestined because they are foreknown but rather they are foreknown because they are predestined. The two divine activities of foreseeing and foreordaining naturally function together and are dependent since either one is

#### 4. **Millard Erickson:**

It is necessary to define what is meant by the term predestination. Although some use it interchangeably with ‘foreordination’ and ‘election,’ for our purposes here ‘predestination’ is midway in specificity between ‘foreordination’ and ‘election.’ ‘Foreordination’ we will regard as the broadest term, denoting God’s will with respect to all matters which occur, whether that be the fate of individual human persons or the falling of a rock. ‘Predestination’ refers to God’s choice of individual life or eternal death. ‘Election is the selection of some for eternal life, the positive side of predestination.’<sup>19</sup>

#### 5. **James Leo Garrett:**

“We...use the term ‘election’ for God’s choice of human beings to eternal life,”<sup>20</sup>

#### 6. **Norman L. Geisler:**

An elect person is a chosen one; election (or elect) is used of Israel (Rom. 9:11; 11:28), of angels (1 Tim. 5:21), and of believers. In relation to believers, election is the decision of God from all eternity whereby He chose those who would be saved. Paul wrote, ‘Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory’ (2 Tim. 2:10). Peter said that the elect are those ‘who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1 Peter 1:2).

The words chosen and chose are used numerous times. The terms are employed of Christ (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 1:20; 2:4,6), of a disciple (Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; 22:14; John 15:10), and even of Judas (John 6:70; 13:18), who was chosen to be an apostle. Soteriologically, a chosen one is a person elected to salvation by God. Ephesians 1:11 is a key passage: In him we were also chosen, having been

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impossible without the other [Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Chafer Systematic Theology*, abridged edition, John F. Walvoord, editor, 2 volumes (Wheaton: Victor Press, 1988), 2:112-13].

<sup>19</sup> Millard Erickson, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 908. He cites Benjamin B. Warfield as one who believes that ‘foreordain’ and ‘predestinate’ are synonyms to such an extent that preference for one over the other is determined only by taste [*Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University, 1929), 4].

<sup>20</sup> James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, & Evangelical*, 2 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:443. The complete quote and his definition of related terms (which may be helpful to note) are as follows:

We will subsequently use the term ‘election’ for God’s choice of human beings to eternal life, the term ‘reprobation’ for the doctrine that God selects from eternity the non-elect human persons to be damned, and the term ‘preterition’ for the doctrine that by choosing the elect God passes over or passes by the non-elect so that they are condemned/punished for their sin/unbelief. We will use the term ‘predestination,’ then, more generally to embrace these three, and the term ‘foreordination’ can be reserved for a more comprehensive trans-salvific meaning associated with the providence of God [Ibid., 443].

predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.<sup>21</sup>

**7. 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.<sup>22</sup>

**8. Charles Hodge:**

(5). From the mass of fallen men God elected a number innumerable to eternal life, and left the rest of mankind to the just recompense of their sins. (6) That the ground of this election is not the foresight of anything in the once class to distinguish them favourably from the members of the other class, but the good pleasure of God.<sup>23</sup>

**9. Robert P. Lightner:**

The plan of redemption the Father designed in eternity past before He even created man has been realized in time. In His infinite wisdom God solved the problem of man's sin caused. His solution involved the choice of sinful humans on whom He would bestow His grace and salvation.<sup>24</sup>

**10. Earl Radmacher:**

The word '*elect*' (*eklegō*) simply means '*to pick out or choose.*' The New Testament usually uses a Greek verbal form that means '*to pick out or choose for oneself.*' Thus Paul declared concerning those who have believed and become the recipients of saving grace: 'He [God] chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).' Election is God's sovereign, gracious plan before creation to save those who believe, not because of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of His good pleasure. This is a sovereign plan because God was under no obligation to elect anyone, and it is an act of grace because the recipients are totally undeserving.

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<sup>21</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 volumes (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 3:221. Geisler's definition of predestination is also worth noting:

Just as God predetermined from all eternity that Christ would die for our sins (Acts 2:23), He also predestined who would be saved. As Paul says, 'Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29) [Ibid., 221].

<sup>22</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 670.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 2:333.

<sup>24</sup> Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, Savior, and Salvation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 145.

## 11. Robert Reymond:

In this doxology [Ephesians 1:4-5] Paul clearly states that from all eternity God had chosen the Christian to holiness and predestined him to sonship. And he did so, Paul writes, “according to the good pleasure of his will...”<sup>25</sup>

## 12. Charles C. Ryrie:

Election is God’s pretemporal choice of those who would be saved.”<sup>26</sup> He also states, “God’s elect in this age have not been chosen from the spectacular people of this world (1 Cor. 1:27-2; James 2:5). They were chosen because the foundation of this world (Eph. 1:4), and because they are elect they are elect they are to live godly lives (Col. 3:12; 2 Pet. 1:10).”<sup>27</sup>

*In Survey of Bible Doctrine* Ryrie defines election this way:

Election may be defined as the action of God in choosing those who will be saved as members of the body of Christ. The concept of election must be rooted in the character of God Himself. In other words, election, as everything God does, is in complete harmony with His character.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 467.

<sup>26</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 626.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 361. Regarding predestination Ryrie defines it “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; Cor. 2:7). God’s elect are predestined to adoption (Eph. 1:5), to an inheritance (v. 1), and to ultimate conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:28-29)” [*Ibid.*, 361]. Ryrie also examines the word “foreknowledge” and makes the following statements:

The word *proginoskō* is used (a) of prior, temporal knowledge (Acts 26:5; 2 Pet. 3:17); (b) of God’s relation to Israel (Rom. 11:2); (c) Christ’s sacrifice (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20); and (d) of God’s people today (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2).

The debate centers around the question of how much relationship exists in the word ‘foreknowledge’....Clearly people are foreknown, not their faith (Rom. 8:28-29). Clearly too foreknowledge as mere perception is not the basis of election, for 1 Peter 1:2 includes a decision on God’s part. Election is in harmony (*kata*) with foreknowledge, and that foreknowledge included the procedure used in working out the choice. Therefore, there is some relationship and/or decision inherent in the meaning of foreknow. Certainly verse 20 includes those ideas or it would assure nothing about the sacrifice of Christ. Likewise there is decisiveness and certainty in Acts 2:23 and Romans 11:2. An apocryphal use of the word also includes certainty: ‘And Thy judgments are in Thy foreknowledge’ (Judith 9:6). To be sure, the word does not say ‘elect,’ but neither can it be reduced to a neutral concept of perception only. It does include decision that in turn has to involve an assurance that comes from certainty [*Ibid.*, 361-62].

<sup>28</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972, 1995) electronic ed. Ryrie goes on to say that election means several things:

1. Election is loving, for God who is love can do nothing unloving (Eph 1:4—the words ‘in love’ may just as well be the opening words of v. 5 as the closing words of v. 4).
2. God’s election is wise because He is wise (Jude 25).

### 13. John F. Walvoord:

Although the doctrine of election is beyond human comprehension, it is clearly a doctrine of Scripture. By divine election God has chosen certain individuals to salvation and predestined them to be conformed to the character His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 16:13; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). It is clear the choice originates in God and this choice is part of God's eternal plan.<sup>29</sup>

## IV. How Election is used in Scripture:

In this section we will examine how “*election*” is used in Scripture:

### 1. The term is used in the following ways:

- A. Of Christ, as Messiah in Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 2:6 (cf. Isaiah 42:1).<sup>30</sup>
- B. Of good angels in 1 Timothy 5:21.<sup>31</sup>
- C. Of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6 and Isaiah 45:5.<sup>32</sup>

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3. His elective purpose originated in eternity past (Eph 1:4) and extends throughout eternity future (Ro 8:30).

4. The outworking of election will not generally violate natural laws which God created and to which He normally binds Himself. This means that the elect will not be saved through an angel suddenly appearing and preaching to them, but through the normal process of hearing and believing the witness that comes from other human beings (Ro 10:14). It also means that the natural law of sowing and reaping applies, so an unbeliever who persists in his unbelief will reap the lake of fire. In other words, the element of the exercise of human responsibility is part of the total program of election.

5. Election ultimately glorifies God (Eph 1:12–14). In some instances this is difficult for us to see. But we must remember that we observe only a very small part of the outworking of God's total program in this universe, and we really are in no position to pass judgment on what He is doing [Ibid].

<sup>29</sup> Lewis S. Chafer & John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, Revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1926, 1953, 1974), 231.

<sup>30</sup> John F. Walvoord offers the following summary:

Another aspect of election is God's election of Christ. He is God's 'chosen One' in whom God the Father delights (Isa. 42:1). At the Transfiguration God the Father said, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him' (Luke 9:35). Though rejected by men, He was chosen by God the Father as 'the living Stone' and 'a chosen and precious cornerstone' (1 Pet. 2:4, 6; see also 1:20), that is, as the foundation of our faith ["Election" in *Theological Wordbook*, 103].

<sup>31</sup> Walvoord writes, "These are unfallen angels, whose election is based on the fact that it is absolutely certain that they will continue as holy angels, having decided in eternity past to serve God. Yet they cannot experience salvation from sin [Theological Wordbook, 105]."

**D.** Of Ministers in Luke 6:13 and Acts 9:15.

**E.** Of Churches in 1 Peter 5:13.

**F.** Of Believers in the following passages:

**1. Election is of God in 1 Thessalonians 1:4:**

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5** because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.<sup>33</sup>

**2. Election of believers is by Christ:**

John 13:16-20:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. **18** I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ **19** I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. **20** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

John 15:16:

**16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

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<sup>32</sup> God chose the nation Israel and set her apart as a special people among the other nations or people group in the world. See Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6-7; 10:15; 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; Psalm 33:12; 105:6, 43; 135:4; Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:20; 44:1; 45:4; Ezek. 20:5. Walvoord states:

This electing of Israel is a completely sovereign act of God, not based on any conditions or the idea that Israel was better or worse than any other nation. God selected Israel so she would be a channel of revelation to others about His person, work, and will.

Because of her special relationship to God, Israel is regarded as a holy people (Exod. 19:6: 22:31), that is, people set apart to Him. In a special sense Israel is God’s possession (Deut. 14:2; Psalm 33:12; 135:4). Therefore she is to praise Him (Isa. 43:21). God’s special dealings with the nation express His nature, perfections, and love (Exod. 9:16; 32:9-14; Psalm 106:8; 47; Isaiah 43:25; 48:9-11; 63:12-14; Ezek. 21-24).

In addition to being elected as a nation, certain persons and tribes in Israel had a special place in God’s plan (Num. 16:5; Deut. 18:1-5; 1 Sam. 10:24; 2 Sam. 6:21; 2 Chron. 6:6; Psalm 78:68). However, the fact that Israel is an elect nation does not mean each individual Israelite has a personal revelation. This is stated clearly in Romans 9:8. Nevertheless, through Israel, God manifests His marvelous grace, as seen in Genesis 12:3 and elsewhere [“Election” in *Theological Wordbook*, 103].

<sup>33</sup>*The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (electronic ed.). Good News Publishers: Wheaton.

3 **Election of believers in Christ in Ephesians 1:3-10:**

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, **8** which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight **9** making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ **10** as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

4. **Election of believers unto Christ involves God the Father in John 6:43-44:**

**43** Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. **44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

5. **Election of believers is according to the purpose of God:<sup>34</sup>**

Romans 9:6-16 (see verse 11):

**6** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, **7** and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” **8** This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. **9** For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” **10** And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11** 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 his call— **12** she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” **13** As it is written, of “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” **14** What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! **15** For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and

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<sup>34</sup> In Ephesians 3:11 the apostle Paul speaks about God’s eternal purpose which he accomplished in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Greek word for purpose is “*prothesin*” may be translated as “plan” or “resolve.” It is in the singular tense which implies that God has an overarching purpose. Moreover, Paul describes this plan as eternal. Therefore, using this adjectival genitive demonstrates that there was never a moment when God had to consider, contemplate, or determine what to do. In other words, He never had to “*make up His mind*” about anything. That is why God is indivisible whereby there is absolutely nothing potential about Him. Stated a different way, we can make the following points:

1. God has always had a plan.
2. This plan was never chronologically designed as if God is building a house and is contemplating what the next step should be.
3. The plan is teleologically and logically designed.

I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” **16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Eph 1:11-14:

**11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to the purpose of him** who works all things according to the counsel of his will, **12** so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. **13** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

**6. Election is according to the foreknowledge of God:**<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In the revised edition of *Major Bible Themes* by Lewis S. Chafer, Walvoord’s comment is pertinent:

One of the knotty problems in the doctrine of election is the relationship of election to foreknowledge. One form of interpretation which tends to soften the concept of election builds on the idea that God foreknew those who would receive Christ, and on the basis of this foreknowledge elected them to salvation. This concept, however, has inherent problems as it seems to make God subject to a plan in which He is not sovereign. While election and foreknowledge are coextensive, foreknowledge itself would not be determinative.

Additionally, in *Theological Wordbook* Walvoord states, “It is also important to distinguish between the omniscience of God, by which He is aware of every possible plan or modification, and His foreknowledge, which is a result of His determining what His purposes will include” [*The Theological Wordbook*, 104].”

Millard Erickson offers counter-evidence to those who believe that election is based upon foreknowledge of what people will do if given the opportunity to decide. He writes:

Nor is the argument that God’s foreordaining is based upon his foreknowledge persuasive. For the word **יָדָעַ** (yada’), which seems to lie behind Paul’s use of *προθεσιν* *ὄσκειν*, signifies more than an advance knowledge or precognition. It carries the connotation of a very positive and intimate relationship. It suggests looking with favor upon or loving someone and is even used of sexual relations. What is in view, then, is not a neutral advance knowledge of what someone will do, but an affirmative choice of that person. Against this Hebraic background it appears likely that the references to foreknowledge not as the grounds for predestination, but as a confirmation of it [Ibid., 926].

Charles Hodge contends:

It is utterly incompatible with this fact that the foresight of faith and repentance should be the ground of election. Men, according to the Apostle, repent and believe, because they are elected; God has chosen them to be holy, and therefore their holiness or their good news in any form or measure cannot be the reason why He chose them. In like manner the Apostle Peter says, believers are elect ‘unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.’ (1 Pet. i.2). Such is the clear doctrine of the Bible, men are chosen to be holy. The fact that God has predestined them to salvation is the reason why they are brought to repentance and a holy faith [*Systematic Theology*, 2:342].

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Wayne Grudem offers the following critique against the notion that election is based on God's foreknowledge of our faith:

Election is not based on God's foreknowledge of our faith for the following reasons:

1. Foreknowledge is of people, not facts (cf. Romans 8:29) whereby God knew persons ('*those whom he foreknew*'), not that he knew some facts about them, such as the facts that they would believe.
2. Scripture never speaks of our faith as the reason God chose us (cf. Rom. 9:11-13; 11:5-6; Eph. 1:5-6; 2 Tim. 1:9).
3. Election based on something good in us (our Faith) would be the beginning of salvation by faith. If the ultimate determining factor in whether we will be saved or not is our decision to accept Christ, then we shall be more inclined to think that we deserve some credit for the fact that we were saved...But once we begin to think this way then we seriously diminish the glory that is to be given to God for our salvation. We become uncomfortable speaking like Paul who says that God 'destined us...according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace' (Eph. 1:5-6), and we begin to think that God "destined us...according to the fact that he knew that we would have enough tendencies toward goodness and faith within us that we would believe."
4. Predestination based on foreknowledge still does not give people free choice. Upon reflection, this system turns out to give no real freedom to man either for if God can look into the future and see that one person will come to faith in Christ and another will not, then those facts are already fixed; in other words, they are determined. Therefore, it is fair to say that their destinies are still determined, for they could not be otherwise. But by what are these destinies determined? If they are determined by God himself, then we no longer have election based ultimately on foreknowledge of faith, but rather on God's sovereign will. But if these destinies are not determined by God, then who or what determines them? Certainly no Christian would say that there is some powerful being other than God controlling people's destinies. Therefore it seems that the only other possible solution is to say they are determined by some impersonal force, some kind of fate, operative in this universe, making things turn out as they do. But what kind of benefit is this? We have then sacrificed election in love by a personal God for a kind of determinism by an impersonal force and God is no longer to be given the ultimate credit for our salvation.

Lightner offers a related criticism regarding foreknowledge as the basis for election:

Some believe God has elected sinners to be saved on the basis of the faith He knew they would have. God 'chose those who He foreknew would accept Christ' [Henry Clarence Thiessen in *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 344]. This is a popular explanation among those Christians who think at all about election. The major weakness in the view is that it seems to view God's foreknowledge merely as foresight....

It seems most in harmony with the totality of Scripture to believe in personal, pre-temporal election as well as corporate election of the church. God's foreknowledge of human faith in His election both of individuals and the church must be included. He did predestine those He foreknew (Rom. 8:29). And He did choose according to His foreknowledge (1 Peter 1:1-2). We are not told what it was in God's foreknowledge which moved Him to choose. It is going beyond what Scripture says to say it was His knowledge of the sinner's faith which caused Him to make the choice....

His plan is the result of His infinite wisdom and love and is in keeping with His absolute holiness, justice, mercy, and grace [*Sin, Savior, and Salvation*, 148-149].

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Radmacher also offers a similar critique:

*Proginōskō*, the Greek word for foreknowledge, sometimes means, as in English, ‘to know beforehand,’ as in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17. But often it means to have a conscious relationship of love. As Paul wrote, ‘And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew [*Proginōskō*], He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren’ (Rom. 8:28-30).

A common view of the words ‘whom He foreknew’ is that by foresight God saw the faith by which some would believe. The problem with this view is that the object of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 is not a person’s faith but is a person (‘whom’). That is, God foreknew the person, not something he or she would do. This is also consistent with the determining action in the other links in the chain right on to glorification. God, not man, is the active Agent from beginning to end. Those whom God elected, He engaged in a conscious, loving relationship (Rom. 8:28) [*Salvation*, 29].

Robert Reymond also offers a valuable critique of this view:

Reformed theologians also understand Paul to mean here that God did not set his love upon the elect from all eternity because of *foreseen* faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other condition or cause in them. To assert that he did, not only intrudes circumstances or conditions into the context but also flies in the face of teaching of Romans 9:11-13, that election is according to grace and not according to works, of Ephesians 1:4, that God chose us before the creation of the world ‘that we should be holy’ and not because he saw that we would be holy, and of 2 Timothy 1:9, that he saved us and called us to a holy life, not because we have done but because of *his own* eternal purpose and grace [*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 466].

Anglican evangelical scholar W.H. Griffith Thomas and co-founder of Dallas Theological Seminary states that the notion that God foresees who will accept Christ, and on that basis predestines them unto salvation is Scripturally inadequate and philosophically impossible. He writes:

The view only becomes possible by an undue pressing of the term ‘foreknow,’ but a careful examination of the passages where this occurs shows that it never means simple foresight, but foresight with approval. Further, the Bible is perfectly clear in regard to God’s election of Israel, that it was wholly independent of anything foreseen in Israel’s life and conduct. Thus, the Arminian view strictly is inconsistent with any true and full conception of Divine grace. Salvation cannot be a mere contingency, for if no one accepted it, then Christ would have died in vain...Election contingent on foresight is really not election at all, since the choice in such a case would be solely man’s, and would leave no room for distinction due to a Divine foreordination. As men are constituted, God must take the initiative in bringing about salvation....One thing is absolutely certain; the sinner cannot renew himself and needs the regenerating grace of God [*Principles of Theology*, 246].

I would personally add that those who contend that the election is based upon the foreknowledge of who would believe have to face the difficulty of harmonizing that conception of foreknowledge with passages that clearly affirm that election is based upon the initiative of God. For example: Paul explicitly told the Thessalonian believers that God had chosen them “from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (1 Thess. 2:13b). In Romans 8:16 Paul writes that salvation by election “*depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy.*” In Acts 13:48 Luke says, “*And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*” 2 Timothy 1:9 states, “*who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.*” In Revelation 13:7-8 states, “*And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the*

Romans 8:28-30:

**28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those **who are called according to his purpose**. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1 Peter 1:2:

**1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

**7. Election of believers is eternal in Ephesians 1:4:<sup>36</sup>**

**4** even as he chose us in him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

**8. Election of believers is the sovereign decision of God:**

Romans 9:15-16-18:

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*foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain*” (Rev. 13:7-8). And if John 15:16a is applicable to believers, not just the disciples in the Upper Room, then this passage may yield support: “*You did not choose me, but I chose (exelexamēn) you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.*” Therefore, based upon these passages, understanding foreknowledge as that knowledge of who would believe, and basing election upon that notion, is found lacking in view of these two, if not three clear passages that declare that God takes the initiative. Nonetheless, it is not unreasonable or unorthodox to embrace foreknowledge as the basis for election; it is just more difficult to support.

<sup>36</sup> Consider the following quote from the abridged version of *Chafer Systematic Theology*:

God elected some to salvation before He even created the world. As stated in Ephesians 1:4, ‘For He chose us in Him before the Creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.’ God’s foreknowledge extends to all events (Acts 15:18; 2 Tim. 1:9) and not simply to election. The concept that election takes place in time does not take into consideration that the Bible declares it to be eternal (2 Thes. 2:13-14)....

As previously explained, God has knowledge of all possible plans, and chose the best plan. Having chosen that plan, He has foreknowledge. Accordingly foreknowledge, foreordination and predestination cannot be placed in sequence, but all were included in the original decree. God could not foreknow as certain something that had not been foreordained, and He could not know that it was foreordained until He chose the plan. The passages that deal with foreknowledge and predestination indicate that they extend the same truths, but the temporal order is not indicated when the verses are properly translated Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29; 1Peter 1:2) [Ibid., 115].

**15** For he says to Moses, “**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.**” **16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. **17** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” **18** So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens **whomever he wills.**

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (see verse 27):

**26** For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But **God chose** what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; **God chose** what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28 God chose** what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **29** so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. **30** He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. **31** Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Ephesians 1:11:

**11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to the purpose of him** who works all things **according to the counsel of his will,**

**9. Election of believers is irrespective of merit as evidenced in Romans 9:11:**

**11** 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 his call—**

**10. Election of believers is of grace as evidenced in Romans 11:5:**

**6** So too at the present time there is a remnant, **chosen by grace.** **6** But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

**7** What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, **8** as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.” **9** And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; **10** let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”

**11. Election is for the glory of God in Ephesians 1:3-6**

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ,

according to the purpose of his will, **6 to the praise of his glorious grace**, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

**12. Election of believers unto salvation through faith in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14:<sup>37</sup>**

**13** But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and **belief in the truth**. **14** To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**13. Election of believers through sanctification of the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 1:2 (see also above: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14):**

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<sup>37</sup> Lightner declares, "Scripture does not present God's plan as incompatible with man's will. The sovereign plan includes the actions and responsibilities of man. It is all part of His plan [*Sin, Savior, and Salvation*, 149]."

W.H. Griffith Thomas writes:

Divine grace is seen to be the source, support, and crown of salvation. And yet Scripture is equally clear and emphatic on human freedom with responsibility. Both sides are clear and emphatic on human freedom and responsibility. Both sides are to be emphasized without any attempt at reconciliation. We must not isolate either the Divine or the human side and consider one apart from the other. The various associations of predestination help us to appreciate its place and power....The two aspects are like parallel lines, and both must be held. As St. Bernard says in a well-known passage: 'Take away free will and there will be nothing to save; take away grace and there will be nothing to save with.' So that we may say: (a) God elects to save; (b) God elects to save in one way (in Christ); (c) God elects to save one class (believers). The difficulty will not as a rule be felt in the practical life of the Christian, but only when the matter is viewed from the standpoint of philosophy and speculation. It is significant that the doctrinal position of Rom. iii comes before that of Roma. viii, and the spiritual apprehension and the experience of the one is the best, indeed the only, preparation for the other. [*Principle of Theology*, 251].

Ryrie states that election alone does not result in salvation of people:

To be sure, election assures that those chosen will be saved, but it alone does not save them. People are saved through faith in the substitutionary death of Christ. And, of course, they must learn about the death of Christ somehow in order to have content to their faith. Thus election, the death of Christ, testimony of His death, and personal faith are all necessary in the salvation of and individual. Election alone does not save [*Basic Theology*, 363].

Geisler' remarks are also insightful:

Likewise, it is necessary that upon the conditions that God chose to create and to save free moral creatures. He does so in accordance with the freedom He gave them. Hence, there is no condition for God's giving salvation, but there is one (and only one) condition laid down for receiving the gift of eternal life: faith (Acts 16:31; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9). Therefore, the reception of salvation is conditioned on our belief. Salvation is unconditional from the perspective of the Giver, but it is conditioned from the view of the receiver (who must believe in order to receive it) In short, salvation comes *from* God, but we receive it *through* faith: 'For by grace you have been saved *through* faith' (Eph. 2:8 NASB) [3:182].

**1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, **in the sanctification of the Spirit**, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

**14. Election of believers unto adoption through Jesus Christ in Ephesians 1:3-6:**

**3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5 he predestined us for adoption** through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

**15. Election of believers unto salvation in 2Thessalonians 2:13-14:**

<sup>13</sup>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, <sup>14</sup>to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**16. Election of believers to conformity with Christ in Romans 8:29-30:**

<sup>29</sup> 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, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**17. Election of believers to good works in Ephesians 2:10:**

<sup>10</sup>For we are His workmanship, created in Christ **Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

**18. Election of believers to eternal glory in Romans 9:23:**

<sup>23</sup>and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

**19. Election of believers to effectual calling in Romans 8:29-30:**

<sup>29</sup> 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, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**20. Election of believers to divine teaching in John 17:6-8:**

<sup>6</sup>“I have manifested your name to the men whom you have given me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. <sup>8</sup> For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

**21. Election of believers to belief in Jesus Christ in Acts 13:48:**

<sup>48</sup> Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been **appointed to eternal life believed.**

**22. Election of believers to acceptance with God in Romans 11:7:**

<sup>7</sup> What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

**23. Election of believers for protection in Mark 13:20:**

<sup>19</sup> For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. <sup>20</sup> And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, **whom He chose, He shortened the days.**

**24 Election of believers will have vindication of their wrongs in Luke 18:6-8:**

<sup>6</sup> Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. <sup>7</sup> And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

**25. Working of all things for good for the elect in Romans 8:28-30:**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that all **things work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

**26. The elect experiences blessings in Psalm 33:12 & 65:4:**

<sup>12</sup>Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the LORD, The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed *is the man* You choose, And cause to approach *You*, *That* he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Of Your holy temple.

**27. The elect receive an inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-5:**

<sup>3</sup>Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an **inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,** <sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

**28. Election should lead to the cultivation of virtue in Colossians 3:12-17:**

Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. <sup>14</sup> But above all these things **put on** love, which is the bond of perfection. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. <sup>16</sup> **Let the word of Christ** dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. <sup>17</sup> And *whatever* you do in word or deed, **do all** in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

**29. Election should be evidenced by diligence in 2 Peter 1:10-11:**

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brethren, **be even more diligent** to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; <sup>11</sup> for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**30. Election produces assurance in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5:**

<sup>2</sup> We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup> remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, <sup>4</sup> **knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.** <sup>5</sup> For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

**31. Election is exemplified in the following historical accounts:**

- a. Isaac in Gen. 21:12.
- b. Abram in Neh. 9:7.
- c. Zerubbabel in Hag. 2:23.
- d. Apostles in John 13:18; 15:19.
- e. Jacob in Rom. 9:12, 13.
- f. Rufus in Rom. 16:13.

g. Paul in Gal. 1:15.

**In conclusion to this section we may reasonably say that the New Testament not merely affirms but declares that election is an aspect of God's eternal plan.**

## V. HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Having examined how “*election*” is used in Scripture we will now proceed to ask ourselves how we should live in view of this doctrinal truth.

- A. Realize that election is an aspect of God's eternal *design* of salvation. Given the fact that God is the sum total of His infinite perfections, even though we may not be able to understand fully why He chose some and not others, we should be able to take comfort in that His design of salvation must be the best of all possibilities.<sup>38</sup> As stated in *Chafer Systematic Theology*:

Though it is difficult for man to conceive of divine election as being other than an arbitrary act of God, it should be clear from Scripture that God in eternity past chose a perfect plan. He is omniscient and knew all possible plans. Because He is infinitely good, He must choose the best of all possible plans.

- B. Election brings glory to God. Election is not used in the Bible to denote anxiety, confusion, or resignation. If God designed the plan, then His plan will bring the most possible glory for He cannot do anything less than His infinite-perfect best. Therefore, we can trust God even if we don't have all the answers because of who He is. As Walvoord states:

While theologians have never been able to resolve completely the problem of divine election as related to human choices and moral responsibility on the part of man, the answer seems to be that in choosing a plan God chose the plan as a whole, not piecemeal. He knew in advance, before the choice of a plan, who in this plan would be saved and who would not be saved. By fait we must assume that God chose the best possible plan, and that if a better plan could have been put into operation God would have chosen it. The plan included much that God would do Himself, such as creation and the establishment of natural law. It

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<sup>38</sup> I use the word “design” very carefully because it brings to mind the concept of a designer. Charles C. Ryrie suggests this illustrative notion:

God is the Architect of a plan which does include all things but includes them in a variety of relationships. Architect's plans are detailed. So is God's plan. In the process of constructing a building, experts can predict that so many workers will be injured and some may even lose their lives. Such grim statistics are included in the planning of the building, yet we would not the architect responsible for the injuries and deaths (assuming proper safety measures). Carelessness, indifference to rules, even violation of safety restrictions are usually the causes of accidents. But whose fault are they? The individuals who are careless or indifferent. So God's plan has been designed so that the responsibility for sin lies with the individual even though God knowingly included sin in His plan” [*Basic Theology*, 312].

included what God sovereignly chose to do Himself, such as to reveal Himself through the prophets and influence men in their choices even though they still are responsible for the choices they make.

In other words, the plan included giving man some freedom of choice for which he would be held responsible. The fact that God knew under each plan what each man would do does not mean that God forced man to do something against his will and then punish him for it.

In the notable instance of the crucifixion of Christ, on which the whole plan of God hinged, Pilate freely made a choice to crucify Christ and was held responsible for it. Judas Iscariot freely determined to betray Christ and was held responsible for it. Yet the choices of both Pilate and Judas were essentially God's program and were sure long before they made them.

Accordingly, while there are problems in human comprehension, the best solution is to accept what the Bible teaches whether or not we can understand it completely.<sup>39</sup>

- C. Praise God for election reaffirms that we don't have to work or earn our salvation. There are no obstacle courses to run, no fight in order to prove which one is mightier, no competition where the verdict is declared in the winning or losing.
- D. Take comfort in that one proof for God's love was His choice of people unto salvation. That God has chosen to bless some individuals with eternal life is clearly taught in many places in both the Old and New Testaments ( e.g., Deut. 4:37 ; 7:6-7; Isa. 44:1-2; Rom. 9; Eph. 1:4-6, 11; Col. 3:12; 2 Thess. 2:13). This does not make God unjust because God is not obligated to save anyone except as a satisfaction of His love. Since no person can earn salvation and the fact that some are saved and others are not is no objection to election.
- E. Don't neglect faith while affirming election. Faith is also an aspect of God's design of salvation. Though discussed in my presentation regarding the compatibility of divine will and human responsibility, God holds each individual personally responsible for his decision to trust or not to trust in Jesus Christ (cf. John 3; Rom. 5). The difficulty in putting divine election and human responsibility together is trying to figure out how both biblical doctrines can be true. *That* both are true is taught in the Bible. *How* both can be true is apparently incomprehensible to finite human minds; no one has ever been able to explain this seeming antinomy satisfactorily. Nevertheless, we can affirm that God can govern over the free acts of humans without destroying their liberty and responsibility.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chafer & Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, 233.

<sup>40</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:332.

- F. Be careful not to indict God of wrongdoing because you don't understand election. He is not arbitrary. Rather, God always exercises His judgments on that basis of His infinite-perfections. In fact, He can only make choices that are in keeping with His infinitely righteous character. Therefore, even though His ways are inscrutable, it would be unbiblical to indict Him of wrongdoing.
- G. Don't avoid the study of the doctrine of election because you find it distasteful; we are meant to know the doctrine of election to the extent that He revealed it to us; the doctrine of election is to be source of comfort, esp. when facing difficult times or overwhelming situations.<sup>41</sup>
- H. Practice holiness. Election is associated with God's demands for holiness (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Because we are saved, having been redeemed, regenerated, propitiated for, and adopted into the family of God, we have most compelling reason to live a life that is maximized for His greatness by yielding our lives to Jesus Christ in the details of daily living. Our response to election should never be one of carnality, compromise, hypocrisy, pride, or selfishness.
- I. Rest in assurance for election results in eternal preservation, glorification, Rapture, and participation in the future earthly millennial kingdom of Christ and the eternal state (Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:3-6; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 3:10; Rev. 20-22).
- J. Be responsible. Election is not merely a privilege by God but an opportunity to honor God with our daily lives; He has elected us unto holiness and to represent His interests on earth. He chose us the freedom of his grace and therefore, we need to be an outstanding representative and steward of God's interests.
- K. Be thankful. Election is a mystery that should evoke worship to our God.
- L. Be evangelistic. Paul states, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10)." Election is Paul's guarantee that there are people who will receive salvation.

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<sup>41</sup> Dr. John F. Walvoord offers a valuable distinction between God's omniscience and foreknowledge by stating, "It is also important to distinguish between the omniscience of God, by which He is aware of every possible plan or modification, and His foreknowledge, which is a result of His determining what His purposes will include" [*The Theological Wordbook*, 104]."

John Calvin writes:

Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know. Therefore we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is any way profitable to suppress....But for those who are so cautious or fearful that they desire to bury predestination in order not to disturb weak souls-with what color will they cloak their arrogance when they accuse God indirectly of stupid thoughtfulness as if he had not foreseen the peril that they feel they have wisely met? Whoever, then heaps odium upon the doctrine of predestination openly reproaches God, as if he had unadvisedly let slip something hurtful to the church [*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. Xxi.3,4].