

## Unconditional Election

by [Rev. Gordon Girod](#)

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### Ephesians 1:5

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

### Ephesians 1:3-14

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

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

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of

his own will:

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

### **UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION First Head of Doctrine: Of Divine Predestination.**

One day I called in the home of a young couple who had recently made their residence in the community of the church. They proved to be members of a church in another denomination. Since no similar church was close at hand, they were quite interested to learn the nature of the Reformed Church.

The young man asked, “Do you believe that one must be ‘born again’ in order to be saved?” I answered, “That is precisely what Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘Ye must be born again.’” Then he asked, “Do you believe that one must make an open acknowledgment of his faith before men in order to be saved?” I answered in the words of Christ, “He who does not confess me before men, I will not confess before my Father who is in heaven.” Again he asked, “Do you believe in evangelism?” Again I answered in the words of Jesus, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

While the young man was quizzing me concerning our beliefs, I was beginning to form an opinion. I thought, “Here’s is a young couple who are in search of real, Biblical Christianity.” But the young man had an ulterior motive in propounding his questions. This became apparent as he wt forth his last question. “Then,” said he, “you don’t believe in election?”

My answer was also in the form of a question. I asked, “What shall I do with a passage such as Romans 8:30 where I read: Whom he [God] foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified? Or what shall I do with a passage such as Ephesians 1:4-5 where I read: ‘ . . . He chose us in him before the foundation of tile world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace . . . ’”

“But,” asked this young man, “how can you believe both? How can you believe that we must preach the Gospel in all the world, that men must be born again of the Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel, that they must then make open acknowledgment of their faith — how can you believe these things and also believe in election?”

“Very simply,” I answered, “for God tells us that those whom He has predestined unto eternal life, He will call; and having called them, He will justify them; and having justified them, He will glorify them.”

Certain steps in the translation of God's elective purpose into human lives are set forth in the *First Head of Doctrine* Art. III, “And that men may be brought to believe, God mercifully sends the messengers of these most joyful tidings to whom he will, and at what time he pleaseth; by whose ministry men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. ‘How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?’ (Rom. 10:14-15)”

This young couple probably had never heard the term “Arminianism.” They probably had not heard the name of Jacobus Arminius; yet, they were expressing the views of this seventeenth century Dutchman. In the early years of the seventeenth century Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch preacher, propounded an unscriptural concept of salvation which has affected the thinking of millions of Christians around the world. To recount his views in briefest and most simple form, Arminius said: “Yes, God must provide salvation. God sent his Son into the world to pay the price of sin. And God remained in control of the redemptive work until the death of Christ had been accomplished on the cross. But there God stopped! From that point on God put the matter of salvation in the hands of man. A man must choose whether he will believe or not, and there is nothing that God can do concerning the man's decision.” Ever since that time this view, which denies that God is not only the author *but also the finisher* of our salvation, has been called Arminianism.

The surprising consideration is that anyone could arrive at such a view while professing to accept the whole Bible as the inspired Word of God. Paul provides an excellent illustration of the manner in which God accomplishes the redemption of man. Paul called attention to an Old Testament family. The mother of the family was about to give birth to a child. Actually, she was about to give birth to twins, but she was not yet aware of that fact. Her confinement appears to have been a difficult one. She was disturbed both physically and spiritually. Like many a believing mother since, she took her problem to the Lord in prayer.

This mother received a verbal answer to her prayer. God declared to her that she should bring forth not one child but two. Further, God declared that the natural order of things should be reversed in the lives of these two sons. The older, who

according to the social order of the day should have been head of the family, should actually become subservient to the younger. The older, who customarily would have been the spiritual leader of the family, was to become a spiritual outcast, while his brother was to take his place in the divine scheme of things.

All this was disclosed to the mother while she was still in confinement, and Paul writes, "For the children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. Even as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9:11-12).

This illustration of Jacob and Esau, chosen by Paul, and pointed up as Paul does, provides one with an insight not only into the redemptive process but into the personal matter of our own redemption. Let us begin by asking: Why was Jacob chosen of God to be numbered with the elect, and why, at the same time, was Esau discarded? This question brings one face to face with the whole matter of election and reprobation. Why is it that God chooses some to eternal life, but allows others to remain under the guilt and condemnation of sin? Paul provides the answer in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians where he writes that the elect have been "foreordained unto adoption as sons . . . according to the good pleasure of his [God's] will" (v. 5). We have been chosen as the children of God, therefore, because it pleased God to do precisely that. Paul further clarifies this statement in his epistle to the Romans where he quotes the words of the Lord, "I will have mercy upon whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I have compassion" (9:15).

From scriptural passages such as the foregoing, the authors of the Canons formulated the definition of election set forth in the *First Head of Doctrine* Art. VII, "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath, out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault, from their primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom he from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation."

One might also ask: On what basis does God make His choice? The answer is: On grounds that are known only to Himself. One thing is certain, the choice is not made on the basis of anything that God finds in the man or fails to find in the man. This is precisely what Paul points out in the case of Jacob and Esau for he writes, ". . . the children not yet having been born, neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of him that calleth" (Rom. 9:11).

This, you will recognize, stands contrary to much modern teaching. Not long ago I picked up a Gospel tract. Someone had left it lying upon a table in the hospital. On the face it said: "How you may be born again." Inside were the instructions

whereby, presumably, one might be born again. It said, in effect, if you will read the Bible, if you will pray, if you will repent, if you will believe, you will be born again.

This is, purely and simply, the doctrine of works. It means that I must do something before God will save me. This might be called conditional salvation. The condition *if* is placed before it. *If* I will read the Bible, *if* I will pray, *if* I will repent, *if* I will believe, *then* I will be saved.

Meanwhile what is God doing? He is waiting. Worse still, He is waiting helplessly. He is waiting to see whether I will read the Bible; He is waiting to see whether I will pray; He is waiting to see whether I will repent of my sin; He is waiting to see whether I will believe. And if I do these things, then — and not before — He will save me.

But the Word of God does not teach a conditional salvation. On the contrary, the Word of God teaches an un-conditional election. This is what Paul meant when he pointed out that the unborn children had done neither good nor bad. They had done absolutely nothing; yet, God had made His choice.

Does this mean there is no necessity of repentance, no necessity of faith in order to be saved? Not at all. It means that when God has chosen a man unto salvation, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction of sin to the man's heart, and God Himself will put a saving faith within the heart of the man.

So one may read further in the *First Head of Doctrine* Art. VII, "This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit; to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy, and for the praise of the riches of his glorious grace as it is written: 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, and to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved' (Eph. 1:4-6)."

This is also the declaration of Paul in the second chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians (v.8) where one may read, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should boast." Here Paul declares that even the faith which is in our hearts is the gift of God, so that we may not boast of our faith.

And isn't that precisely what some do? Boast of their faith? You have heard them do it. They say: I heard the evangelist preach. I heard him present the invitation. I

walked down the aisle. I made my decision. I prayed. I repented. I believed. I was saved. Notice the I, I, I. After a recital like that, one might well be led to question if God has anything to do with salvation.

Hear again the Word of God as it is recorded in the Epistle to the Romans. Hear the Lord say, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I have compassion. So then," declares Paul, "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy" (9:15-16).

John corroborates this fact in his Gospel where one may read, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become the children of God, even to them who believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (1:12-13).

You see, the spiritual egotists who boast of their salvation forget many things. They forget that if they have heard the evangelist preach, it was only because it was foreordained that they should hear him, and because the Spirit of God led them to hear him. They forget that if they were moved to make a decision, it was only because God had foreordained that they should, and because the Spirit of God moved upon their hearts. Above all they forget the unforgettable words of Christ, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

Because this is the case, we read, "This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it de-pended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the Apostle. 'He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy and without blame before him in love' (Eph. 1: 4)," *First Head of Doctrine*, Art. IX.

Since it is God Himself who makes the choice, and since there is nought in us that leads Him to make that choice, does the Word of God provide any clue as to the manner in which God makes His selection? Again, Paul provides the answer, for one may read in the Epistle to the Ephesians (1:11-12) that God ". . . worketh all things according to the counsel of his will, *to the end* that we should be to the praise of his glory."

Paul elaborates on this answer in his Epistle to the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:27-30) where he writes, 'But God chose the foolish things of the world that he might put to shame them that are wise; and God chose the weak things of the world that he might put to shame them that are strong; and the base things of the world, and the things which are despised, did God choose, yea and the things that are not that he might bring to nought the things that are, that no flesh should glory before God.'

God wants me to know, and God wants the whole world to know, that when He chose me, He was choosing that which was foolish, that which was weak, that which was base, that which was despised; yea, that which was not. God wants me to know, and He wants the whole world to know, that it was only because of sovereign mercy, and not because of anything which I have done that He has chosen me. The grand old hymn has it correctly:

*Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands.  
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow;  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

God wants me to stand before the whole world, not to boast, but so that the whole world may see and know that God took what was wretched and base and vile and de-praved and worthless, and made me, that worthless one, into a child of God.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.*

That the apostles understood this fact is clear. When Paul and Barnabas came to Pisidian Antioch on the first missionary journey, they went to the Jewish synagogue as was their custom. After the traditional reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue gave the customary invitation to any who might "have a word of exhortation for the people." Paul immediately arose and began to preach to them. The next Sabbath, we read, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, writes Luke, and they created an uproar. It was at this point that Paul said, "Since you will not hear us, we will turn to the Gentiles." And turn to the Gentiles they did, preaching to them of Christ and the redemption which He worked upon the cross. Then Luke adds this significant comment: ". . . and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

As many as were ordained to eternal life believed! Not one more. Not one less. The elect, those who had been foreordained to adoption as sons, those who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God — these believed.

This fact, when it is explained, always leads to the none-too-intelligent rhetorical question: Then there is nothing that I can do to be saved? There are two answers to that question. The first is this: There is no problem for the reprobate. He does not want to be saved. He is not concerned about the fact of his lost estate. Remember the words of Christ, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." But the reprobate does not come. He does not want to come. He has no desire to come. Therefore, he is lost, precisely because he does not want to be saved. Not a single soul in the history of the human race has desired salvation and been withheld from it. Not a single soul has ever sincerely desired eternal life and failed to receive it. And in the day of judgment this will be their condemnation, that they preferred the darkness to the light, that they would not come unto the light, because their works were evil. This will be their condemnation, that they preferred the things that moth and rust can corrupt, the things that thieves can break through and steal — they preferred these to the things that are eternal. For if they had come unto Him, they would have in no wise been cast out.

Therefore, no soul shall ever say unto God: "I would have come, but ye would not have me." No soul shall ever say unto God: "I desired life but ye gave me death." On the contrary, in that day when we shall know as we are known, the reprobate shall know the truth, that by his continued defiance of God, that by his continued rebellion against God, that by his unwillingness to be reconciled to God, he has cost himself eternal life and brought upon himself eternal condemnation.

Under the *Second Head of Doctrine*, which we consider in the next chapter, one reads in Arts. V and VI, "Moreover the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel. And, whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves."

Now you may be another type of person. Perhaps you are saying in your heart: "I am concerned about my soul. I have not confessed Christ before men; therefore, I know that He will not confess me before the heavenly Father. I am not a part of the visible, institutional Church which is the earthly embodiment of the communion of the saints; and therefore, I am not bound up in the invisible communion of the saints; for if I were, I would want to unite with the saints on earth. I have not received the sacraments. I have not been baptized, and therefore, I have not received the sign and seal of redemption. I have not partaken of the Lord's Supper, and therefore, I have not received the sacrament of His death and resurrection. If the Word of God be true, I am lost; and yet, I am concerned about my soul. Is there nothing that I can do to be saved?"

Of course there is. The first thing that you can do is to thank God that He has made you to be concerned. There is only one way in which you could become concerned: His Spirit has in some measure touched you. Once God has taken that initial step, there is something which you can do.

Next hear the word of Paul to the congregation at Philippi when he wrote to them, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." This is not a word to the untouched. Far from it. This is a word to those in whom God is working. To these Paul said, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13).

Knowing this, fall upon your knees to pray the sinner's prayer, even with the publican of old, "God, be thou merciful to me, a sinner."

You say, "I don't want to fall upon my knees to plead with God. My sins are not that great. I have done nothing so wrong." I say to you: "Go away. Your professed concern for your soul is a fraud and a delusion. Your desire for God is a delusion. Your pride is more important to you than your soul. Your obstinacy, your rebellion against God will cost you your life."

But another person may say: "I will fall upon my knees. I will pray the sinner's prayer. What next must I do?" I answer, "Pray along with him of old saying, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'"

And you say: "What then?" The answer based on the Word of God is: If you have prayed this prayer in sincerity of soul, if the Spirit of God has prayed with your spirit, your prayer will be answered. You will rise from your knees with a faith in your heart that will burst through the door of your lips. There will be within you a compulsion to do the will of God. You will want to stand before God and the Church and the whole world to confess that He is your Saviour, your Lord, your King. You will not rest at night until you have done it. You will yearn for the sign and seal of redemption to be placed upon you. You will not have a moment of peace until you have been baptized into the fellowship of His death and resurrection.

When you have done all this, the truth will suddenly burst in upon you. You will realize that you have not chosen Him, but that He has chosen you! He has led you each step of the way. And you will say: "Thank God! Thank God that He stooped from the throne of heaven to lift me out of the miry clay and set me free. Thank God that whereas once I was lost, now I am found; whereas once I was blind, now I see. Thank God, that with His own hand He took me from the grave where I lay dead in trespasses and sin, that He breathed into my dead soul the breath of life, the life that shall ever be, both in this world and that which is to come.

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