

SALVATION IN ETERNITY PAST

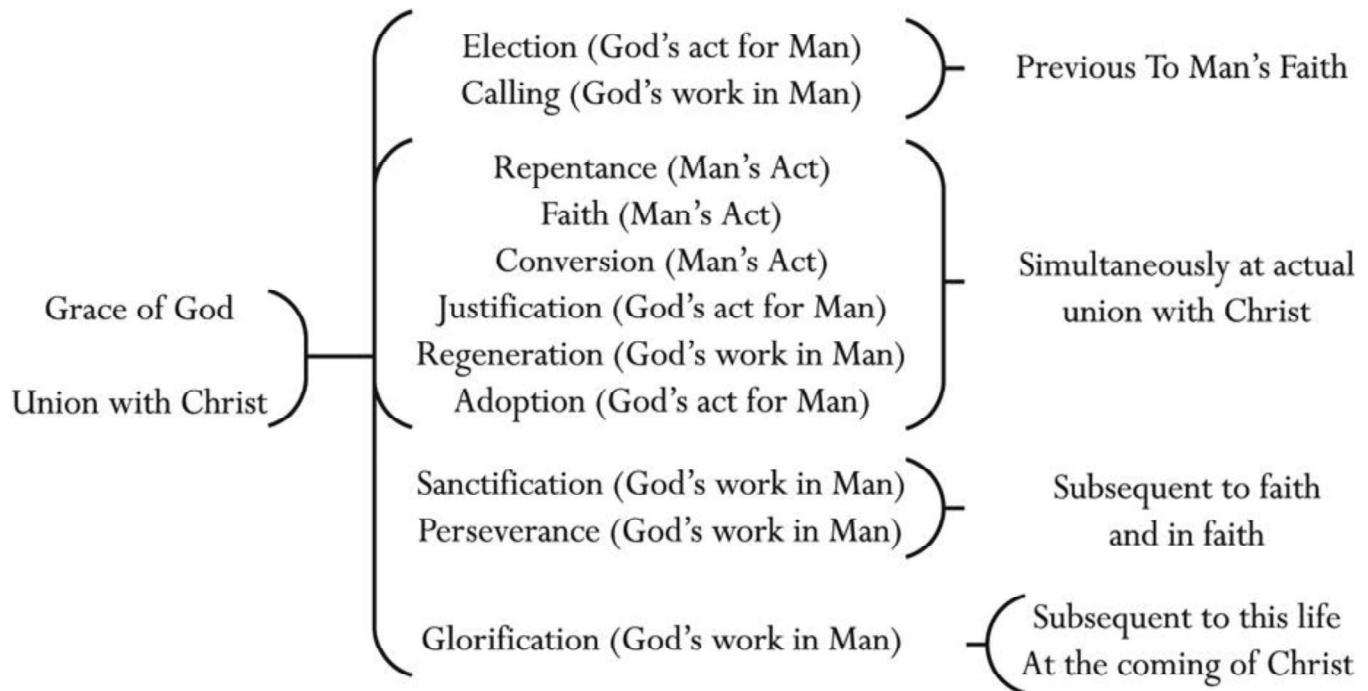


Chart found in Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2005), 654.

- As we start this study by looking into eternity past and into the decrees of God, it is very important to stay with what the Bible says regarding these points...even if we don't agree or fully understand.
- Throughout history (especially church history), man has taken the eternal works of God (foreknowledge, predestination, election) to various extremes.
- The goal in studying this is not to have exhaustive information. We can never achieve that...I don't know if we will fully understand it all when we get to heaven.
- But our study is for us to get to know about our God. We want to be able to say with great joy, *for I have known my God!*
 - J.I. Packer says, "Those who know God have great thoughts of God."¹
- After taking the last several weeks and looking at what the Bible says about the hopelessness of mankind, are your thoughts towards God that much sweeter?
- Do you stand in awe that a holy and righteous God would even consider your salvation?
- The fact that He sustains our every breath and makes our paths daily to live for Him, should, at the very least, cause us to stop and give thanks.

¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 50th anniversary ed., 29.

- Packer goes on to say, “He knows, and foreknows, all things, and his foreknowledge is foreordination; he, therefore, will have the last word, both in world history and in the destiny of every man; his kingdom and righteousness will triumph in the end, for neither men nor angels shall be able to thwart him.”²

Foreknowledge and Predestination

- **We start where every good story starts, in the mind of the Author.**
- As I previously stated, we must be very careful when diving into eternity past, into the decrees and mind of God. We do not have a full picture and likely do not understand fully the pieces we see.
- What we know about our salvation before time we find in the Bible.
- Let’s start with the golden chain of redemption:
- **Romans 8:28-30** “{28} And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. {29} For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; {30} and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”
- There are two terms here that Paul uses that may seem a bit different to us...**foreknowledge and predestination**
- The terms foreknowledge and predestination are all very similar.
- **Foreknowledge** defines what God knows in advance.
 - When speaking of what God knew, we must keep in mind that in order for God to essentially be God, He can never come to know more than He has already known.
 - If God were to know more tomorrow than He does today, He would not be perfect, all knowing, ever present, all-powerful and unchangeable.
 - God’s attributes must all “fit” together.³
 - Foreknowledge, in the context of salvation (as **Romans 8**), it refers to God’s selective choice of individuals with whom to enter into a loving relationship.
 - It is God’s favorable disposition towards someone...before they ever existed.

² Ibid.

³ God is not made up of parts, God is one. We “see” Him in parts, as it were, but He is all traits working all the time together.

- **1 Peter 1:1-2** “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ***who are chosen {2} according to the foreknowledge of God the Father***, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”
- Here is the use of chosen language with God’s foreknowledge.
- **Predestination** then is the act or decree from God. Therefore, Paul writes that those whom God foreknew (not an action but knowing) He also predestined (an action which comes from what God knew).
 - **Ephesians 1:5-6** “He **predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, {6} to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”
 - Just like in **Romans 8:29**, God’s foreknowledge is coupled with His predestining.
- I want to bring out some of the very small differences we see in Scripture.
- God foreknew certain people and predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son. Since God exists in eternity, foreknowledge and predestination are not sequential actions on His part, but logical aspects of His decree.⁴
 - Furthermore, and we’ll talk about this a lot later, those whom God foreknew and predestined had a very specific purpose...to be made more into the image of Christ.
- Jesus said in **John 10:26**, “But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.”
 - Jesus didn’t say that they could not be part of His sheepfold because they were not believing. He said they were not believing because they were not part of His sheepfold.
- This tells us the reason people believe the gospel is because they **already** belong to God. This is what took place in eternity past by God’s sovereign decree.
- In other words, as the Bible says, they were predestined for salvation before they were ever born.
- God’s foreknowledge and predestination is not because the sheep would one day believe.
 - There are erroneous teachings that say foreknowledge means that God only knows who will believe, but the believing is up to the person. He looks down the corridor of time and elects people for salvation who already believe from their own strength.

⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/order-salvation/>

- Foreknowledge and predestination are not based upon the person, but on God's plan for "adoption as sons in Christ Jesus" before they ever existed.
- The truth is that the word foreknew in **Romans 8:29** is not necessarily or merely speaking of God knowing the future, though that could be included.
- *What it describes is a predetermined relationship in the knowledge of God whereby God brings the salvation relationship into existence by decreeing it into existence ahead of time.*
- Looking at **Romans 8:29**, this verse takes the theological consequences of **Acts 2:23** "...this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and **foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." one step further in that it teaches that God not only knows future events, but He also knows people who were yet to be born.
- God knew the people who were going to nail Jesus to the cross, not just that Jesus would be crucified.
- **Couple of things to point out:**
- Scripture does not say that God's foreknowledge is based upon certain decisions on our part.
 - While God certainly does know what we are going to choose in any circumstance that we are in, that has nothing to do with our salvation.
 - Remember, we were dead...unable to come to God without His intervention.
 - Regarding salvation, Paul writes in **Romans 9:16** "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."
 - You can't *will* yourself into salvation. It is only possible because of God's mercy.
 - Once again, thinking back to **Matthew 19**, with God all things are possible.
- Scripture does not say that God foresees our faith and then predestines us.
 - Again, the problem with this view is that it assumes that God looks down the passage of time...this view all but ignores the fact that God is outside of time.
 - Furthermore, this view puts the emphasis of salvation on man, not God.
 - In this system, God's initiative would be removed, and His grace would be blemished.
- "If God's election of men to everlasting life depended on his foresight of their faith and good works, his redeeming love could be no such distinguished favour as the Scripture represents it."⁵

⁵ John Brown of Haddington, *Systematic Theology: A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion*. 1817, p. 154

- **No, Paul does not say** “whose faith He foreknew,” but “whom He foreknew.” It rightly places the object of His knowledge upon the people He knew beforehand, ***not upon their faith***.
- God’s predestination was not based upon the faith of men, ***but upon His gracious commitment to us*** before we were ever born.
- The word *know* is sometimes used in the Bible to describe an intimate or personal relationship between a man and a woman.
- In a similar sense, before God ever created the heavens and earth, He knew His elect in a personal way and chose them to be His sheep.
 - His choice was not because they would someday follow Him, ***but in order to guarantee that they would follow Him***. Remember what Jesus said...not a sheep so no belief.
- His knowing them and choosing them is the reason they follow Him, not the other way around.
 - We must keep in mind that from conception, we have been unable to search for God, find God, know God, love God, or any other good thing about God.
- This would mean that the issue really is not whether or not God knows who will believe, but why some believe and others do not.
- The biblical answer to that is God graciously chooses to have mercy on some and others He justly leaves in their sinful rebellion.
- **Romans 9:13-15** “Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."
- Speaking on this, Spurgeon was confronted by a woman who struggled with the doctrine of election. She said to Spurgeon that she could not understand why God would hate Esau.
- **Spurgeon replied**, “That, madam, is not my difficulty at all; my difficulty is to understand how God could love Jacob.”
- This was to point out that without God’s sovereign grace we would all be **rightly** receiving God’s justice.
- It’s amazing that God’s grace towards sinners rarely gets the pushback that His justice does.
- It is as if mercy has become something that is just expected and the holiness of God is put as a second or third tier doctrine.

- Remember, Scripture declares that God's foreknowledge is not simply insight, but a personal knowledge of us.
- God made a deliberate decision as to whom He would foreknow in eternity past.
- Therefore, in **Romans 8:29** the word "foreknowledge" does not indicate the God simply saw ahead of time that some would exercise faith.
- It is actually the initial, determining, selecting step in God's arranging for some to be His own.
- It leads to blessing for those whom He foreknew and predestined, because it does not leave their relationship to God to chance.

ELECTION AND REPROBATION (DOUBLE-PREDESTINATION)

- **Let's start by defining election:**
- 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.⁶
- This election has been called unconditional election, meaning that God sovereignly, of His own choosing, selects those who will be saved and that God's choice of who is saved is not in any way affected by what that person does or will do.
- In other words, there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him. It is not based on a person's faith or merit, simply God's own choice.
- **I scarcely can think of another doctrine which has been so brutalized over the years than election.**
- Some conservative Dutch Reformed ministers held that because God had already chosen the "elect" from eternity, the gospel should only be preached to those who showed signs of being among that number.⁷
 - This is not biblical, not grace-filled, and certainly should not be believed or practiced.
- When desiring to go to the heathen in the late 1700's, William Carey spoke before the Baptist mission board in England, telling of the plight of the Indian people. The response he got was "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."
 - You can imagine if mission's boards had that same attitude today.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1994, p. 670

⁷ Also English Particular Baptists, Primitive Baptists, PRC, and some others.

- **I like what Spurgeon says concerning the doctrine of election⁸:**
- My friends, I think that this overwhelming mass of Scripture testimony must stagger those who dare to laugh at this doctrine. What shall we say of those who have so often despised it, and denied its divinity, who have mocked its justice and dared to defy God and call Him an Almighty tyrant, when they have heard of His having elected only so many to eternal life. Can you, O rejecter! tear it out of the Bible? Can you take the penknife of Jehudi and cut it out of the Word of God? Would you be like the woman at the feet of Solomon, and have the child cut in halves, that you might have your half? Is it not here in Scripture? And is it not your duty to bow before it? To receive it as the truth even though you can't understand its meaning? I will not attempt to prove the justice of God in having thus elected some and left others. It is not for me to argue with my Master. He will speak for Himself, and He does so: "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'
- **Let's look at what the Scriptures have to say about election.**
- We must, as we have in the past several months, set the need again. In other words, we must know if there is a need for God to elect someone to salvation.
- **John 6:44** "No one can come to Me unless *the Father who sent Me draws him*; and I will raise him up on the last day."
- **Ephesians 2:4-5** "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, {5} even when we were dead in our transgressions, *made us alive* together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)..."

 - Unless the divine intervention of God the Father, no one would be saved.

- **Colossians 3:12** "So, as those who have been *chosen of God*, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience..."
- **1 Thessalonians 1:4** "...knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His choice of you...*"
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14** "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because *God has chosen you* from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this *He called you* through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (effectual calling is later, but seen here)

⁸ <https://www.monergism.com/election-0>

- Notice what Paul says here...God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation and then...it was for this He called you through our gospel.

Some helpful technical aspects of grammar which leads to our beliefs about God:

- Firstly, God has chosen you from the beginning is an aorist middle indicative verb.
 - That means it was in the past when it happened, it has nothing to do with you or your present circumstances. It means that God acted upon you for Himself without regard to you.
- Secondly, God called you through the gospel.
 - The verb called is the same, aorist indicative.
 - Once again, this was an act that happened in the past.
- Both of the verbs are past events (aorist tenses), but their meanings are different.
- *The saved individual is the subject in both, but our salvation was secured in eternity past when God chose us. Then, hearing the gospel, our past salvation from God became a present reality to us.*
- These verses in **2 Thessalonians** are crystal clear how election and salvation work.
- **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14** “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. {14} It was **for this He called you through our gospel**, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- God chose those whom He would save, and we know whom He has chosen because when they hear the gospel they respond.
- **Ephesians 1:4-5** “...just as He chose (ἐκλέγομαι) us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...”
- **ἐκλέγομαι** – made up of two parts...the preposition **ἐκ** meaning out of or from and **λέγω** meaning to say. This is how we get elect or chose, God Himself called out for those who He was going to save before the foundation of the world.
- We were chosen in Christ before the world was created.

- When we think of being chosen in Christ, it means that “men are chosen by God to everlasting life in Jesus Christ, as their representing Head.”⁹
- Our election is expressly represented in Christ; He is our new covenant head and the One who is the executioner of the decree.
- All that we have is because we are in Christ.
- We no longer are identified with Adam as our representative head, but Christ.

What about Double Predestination or reprobation?

- This is the belief that God created people, elected some to Heaven and then actively or purposefully elected some to Hell.
- It is important to understand that when God chose some and not others for salvation, he regarded them not as morally neutral but as already-fallen creatures. That is not to say that they were already created and fallen, for God’s decree is eternal and thus pretemporal. Rather, from eternity, ***before anyone had been created***, God conceived of or contemplated all people in light of their fall in Adam and thus as sinful creatures.¹⁰

What does the Bible teach?

- “In the presentation of Scripture the cause of election lies in God, and the cause of reprobation lies in the sinner”¹¹
- It is significant that no terminology like “elect unto destruction, etc.” occurs in Scripture; Thus, one may not posit an equal but opposite action
- What applies to the non-elect is not specific selection unto eternal damnation out of the state of lostness but a ***divine passing over***. Election is that specific selection, out from one state into another.
- “While logically the election of some implies the rejection of others, ***Scripture is clearly reluctant to set these two ideas in strict balance.***” (Milne, Know the Truth, 185)
 - This would be where many fall into the trap of using man’s logic when talking about the eternal decrees of God. This is where the above-mentioned churches got into trouble.

⁹ John Brown of Haddington, *Systematic Theology: A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion*. 1817, p. 154

¹⁰ *Biblical Doctrines*, p. 505

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 686

- When we talk about salvation and condemnation in the Bible, we know that God actively works in the hearts of those whom He has elected to salvation.
- For those whom He did not elect to salvation, He simply passes over and allows them to live happily in rebellion in their sins.
- While this can be a difficult doctrine to accept (let alone know), it is clearly taught in the pages of Scripture and is for the glory of God.
- I will close this section with another quote from Spurgeon:
- "Ah, but," some say, "I thought it meant that God elected some to heaven and some to hell." That's a very different matter from the gospel doctrine. He has elected men to holiness and to righteousness, and through that to heaven. ***You must not say*** that He has elected them simply to heaven, and others only to hell. He has elected you to holiness, if you love holiness. If any of you love to be saved by Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ has elected you to be saved. If any of you desire to have salvation, you are elected to have it, if you sincerely and earnestly desire it. ***But, if you don't desire it, why on earth should you be so incredibly foolish as to complain because God gives that which you don't like to other people?"***¹²

What are man's responsibilities for salvation?

- If man does not have free will or the ability to come to Christ for salvation...what part does man play in coming to the Lord?
- Remember, the gospel is offered to everyone. Paul says in Romans 10:13 "for whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."
- **We are to preach the gospel to everyone.** A belief in biblical predestination and election should motivate people to share the gospel because they know that it is all a work of God.
- **Acts 13:48** "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."
- There are people all around the globe who are waiting to have the message of the gospel preached to them so they too may come into the family of God and glorify His word in their lives.
- In fact, some of the greatest evangelists in church history were themselves strong believers in the doctrine of election. This was a great motivator for them to share the gospel with everyone.

¹² <https://www.monergism.com/election-0>

- John Calvin sent missionaries as far away as to Brazil. (from Geneva, Switzerland).
 - This 1557 arrival is recognized as the first Protestant mission to the New World. On March 10, 1557, they held the first Protestant worship service in Brazil.
- Davin Brainerd was a missionary to our own Native American population and is believed to have inspired more missionaries than anyone else in church history.
 - William Carey, Henry Martyn, Jim Elliot, David Livingstone, Andrew Murray, and Adoniram Judson to name a few of the more popular men.
 - Men like John Wesley and Francis Asbury used Brainerd's life as an example to follow.
- Jonathan Edwards was a preacher during The Great Awakening.
 - He saw election as a “spur to action.” God uses the preaching of the gospel as the “ordinary means” of calling His elect to salvation.
- Again, William Carey is considered to be the *father of modern missions* and started many mission movements.
- Robert Moffat, John Stott, Francis Schaeffer, the list goes on and on.
- Men and women who understand that God uses preaching of His Word to call His elect, never shy away from giving such messages.
- **The full weight of salvation is upon God, not upon the messenger.**
- Upon hearing the gospel, men are then commanded to repent.
 - We will talk about this much more in the calling, faith and repentance.
- We are not those who believe God saves without the person knowing and without a person responding by repenting.
- Throughout Scripture we are commanded to repent. How can we know if we are in the family of God? It is when we repent and put our faith and trust in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.
- What does this look like?
- **1 Thessalonians 1:9** “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God...”
- We know that even repentance is a gift from God, as Paul says in **2 Timothy 2:25**. This should be our prayer for the lost around us...that God would grant them repentance.