

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 2: THE ETERNAL FOUNDATION

Election and the Covenant of Redemption

Lesson 5

Unconditional Election

Chosen Before the Foundation of the World

The First Link in the Golden Chain

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”

Key Texts: Ephesians 1:3–11; Romans 8:29–33; 9:6–24; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 15:16; Acts 13:48

“He chose 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, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

Ephesians 1:4–6, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Of all the doctrines that the Reformed tradition has recovered from the pages of Scripture, none is more exhilarating, more humbling, more contested, or more personally searching than the doctrine of unconditional election. It is the doctrine that reaches furthest back behind the horizons of time and space into the eternal counsel of the living God, and it is the doctrine that, when it is received with the spiritual seriousness it deserves, produces the most thoroughgoing dismantling of human pride and the most stable, unshakeable foundation for gratitude and worship that the Christian life can know. It is also the doctrine against which fallen human nature reacts with the most predictable and persistent hostility, not primarily because the intellectual objections to it are strong, but because it deprives the human creature of the one thing that the fallen will most desperately wants to retain: the credit for its own salvation.

Unconditional election may be defined as God's eternal, sovereign, personal choice of specific individuals for salvation, made solely according to the good pleasure of His own will and not conditioned upon anything foreseen in those individuals, not foreseen faith, not foreseen obedience, not foreseen moral excellence of any kind. It is the first link in the golden chain of Romans 8:29–30, the “foreknew” and the “predestined” that stand at the head of the chain and guarantee everything that follows. It is the temporal manifestation of the eternal covenant of redemption studied in Lesson 4, the moment in the divine decree when the Father's giving of a specific people to the Son, which was the eternal backdrop of the *pactum salutis*, takes the form of the doctrine that the tradition has called election or predestination.

The doctrine is not a peripheral addition to the apostolic gospel; it is embedded at the very heart of Paul's most carefully constructed letters and is attested by every strand of the New Testament's soteriological testimony. Paul cannot write to the Ephesians about the blessings of salvation without immediately tracing those blessings to their source in a pre-temporal divine choosing (Ephesians 1:4). He cannot write to the Romans about the certainty of salvation without grounding that certainty in the immutable purpose of God who “calls according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). He cannot address the apparent failure of God's word to Israel without returning, with careful exegetical argument, to the principle that “it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Romans 9:16, NASB 1995). And he cannot comfort the Thessalonian believers about their salvation without explicitly rooting that comfort in the fact that “God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation” (2 Thessalonians 2:13, NASB 1995). Election is not Paul's hobby horse; it is the indispensable backstory of the gospel he preaches.

This lesson will proceed through seven major sections: the definition and essential character of election; the primary Pauline texts and their exegesis; the unconditional character of election and its defense from Romans 9; the relationship between election and foreknowledge; the Arminian doctrine of prescient election and the Reformed response; the effects of election on the character and life of the believer; and the pastoral use and misuse of the doctrine in preaching and care of souls. Throughout, the governing conviction is the one that Paul himself states with characteristic directness in Ephesians 1:6: the ultimate purpose of the doctrine of election is not the intellectual satisfaction of systematic theologians but “the praise of the glory of His grace”, and every other purpose the doctrine serves is subordinate to and in service of that one.

A word of pastoral orientation before we begin. The doctrine of election has been more frequently the occasion of spiritual anxiety than of the comfort it was designed to produce, and this pastoral misuse has been as damaging

to the cause of the doctrine as any theological objection. The anxious soul that reads the doctrine of unconditional election and immediately asks “Am I one of the elect?” has asked a question that the doctrine is incapable of answering by itself. The doctrine tells you that God has chosen a specific people in Christ; it does not tell you, by its own direct statement, whether you are among them. The answer to that question lies not in the doctrine of election but in the doctrine of effectual calling and the evidence of regeneration: the question “Am I elect?” is answered not by gazing into the secret counsel of God but by examining the evidence of God’s sovereign work in your own soul. We will return to this pastoral point at the close of the lesson, because it is as important as any of the doctrine’s exegetical or theological dimensions.

I. Election Defined

The Eternal, Unconditional, Sovereign Choice of God

A. Definition and Essential Character

Election, in the theological sense in which this lesson employs the term, is God's eternal, sovereign, personal choice of specific individuals for salvation, a choice made entirely within the divine will, prior to any consideration of the creature's foreseen response, and grounded solely in the good pleasure of the One who chooses. The Greek word translated "chose" in Ephesians 1:4 is *exelēxato*, from the verb *eklegō*, to pick out, to select, to choose from among a larger group for a specific purpose. The compound prefix *ek* (out of, from among) makes the selectivity of the choice explicit: God chose some and not others, from within the totality of the human race, for the purpose of salvation. This selection was made "before the foundation of the world", *pro katabolēs kosmou*, a phrase that anchors the election firmly in the pre-temporal counsel of God, before the creation of the world, before the fall of Adam, before the appearance of a single human being to whom the choice might respond.

The essential character of election as the Reformed tradition has understood it may be summarized in four affirmations. First, election is personal and specific: God did not merely decree that a type of person (those who would believe) would be saved; He chose specific individuals by name, from before the foundation of the world. This is the plain force of the personal pronouns in Ephesians 1:4–5 ("He chose us... He predestined us") and the individual names and groups in the texts that follow. Second, election is eternal: it was not made in response to events in history but in the pre-temporal counsel of God, before anything that might condition it had occurred. Third, election is sovereign: it is the free, uncaused act of the divine will, grounded in nothing outside of God Himself. Fourth, election is unconditional: it is not based on any foreseen quality, merit, response, or decision in the creature. The four affirmations together constitute the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election, and each is directly attested by the primary Pauline texts that form the exegetical basis of the doctrine.

It is equally important to define what election is not, in order to guard against the misunderstandings that have consistently plagued the doctrine's reception. Election is not fatalism, the deterministic system in which all events, including human choices and moral actions, are driven by an impersonal mechanical necessity that makes human agency and responsibility illusory. Election is the sovereign purposing of a personal God who works through genuine creaturely agency to accomplish His purposes, not despite that agency but through it, in ways that honor rather than negate the reality of human willing and acting. Election is not arbitrary, as if God chose randomly, without wisdom or reason, selecting some and passing over others on a whim. Election is rooted in the eternal wisdom of the God who "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11, NASB 1995), a will that is not capricious but is the expression of the most perfect moral intelligence in the universe. And election is not the negation of human responsibility, the elect are not saved against their will, and the non-elect are not condemned for a choice that was not genuinely theirs to make. Both truths are maintained, in irreducible tension, by the apostolic testimony.

The distinction between election and predestination, while often used interchangeably in popular discussion, carries a slight technical difference that is worth preserving. Election refers to God's choice of specific individuals for salvation; predestination refers to His appointment of those individuals to a specific end, namely, conformity

to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29) and adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5). Predestination is the purposive dimension of the electing choice: God did not merely choose people to save in some generic sense; He predestined them to a specific, glorious, Christomorphic destiny. The goal of predestination, conformity to the image of the Son, discloses the character of the electing love: God chose His people not merely to rescue them from condemnation but to conform them to the likeness of the One who is the eternal object of His infinite delight.

B. Election in the Context of Ephesians 1:3–11

The primary locus classicus for the doctrine of election in the New Testament is Ephesians 1:3–11, and it deserves careful contextual attention before individual verses are extracted for doctrinal argument. The passage is set within the largest doxological context in the Pauline letters: a single, sustained, breathless sentence of praise, running in the Greek from verse 3 to verse 14 without a period, in which Paul blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for every spiritual blessing with which He has blessed us in Christ. The grammar is significant: the blessing flows from God to us, not from us to God. The initiative, the provision, the gift, everything is God's. The human beings named in this sentence are the recipients of a sovereign generosity that flows entirely from the divine side, and the refrain that punctuates the passage three times ("to the praise of His glory" in vv. 6, 12, 14) makes clear that the terminus of every blessing named is the glorification of the Giver, not the satisfaction of the recipient.

Within this doxological framework, Paul traces the origin of every spiritual blessing to the pre-temporal choosing of the Father: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him" (v. 4, NASB 1995). Three exegetical observations are immediately relevant. First, the choosing is "in Him", that is, in Christ. Election is not a bare decree of bare individuals; it is the Father's choice of a people in vital union with the Son, the same union that is the source and ground of every spiritual blessing named in the passage. The elect are not chosen in isolation; they are chosen in Christ, as members of the body of which He is the Head, as recipients of the blessings that flow from their union with Him. Second, the purpose of the choosing is holiness: "that we would be holy and blameless before Him." Election is not a license for moral indifference; it is the divine appointment to a specific moral destiny. The elect are chosen for holiness, and the holiness to which they are chosen is the necessary and certain fruit of the election. Third, the ground of the choosing is in the divine will itself: "according to the kind intention of His will" (v. 5). No other ground is mentioned. No foreseen faith, no foreseen obedience, no merit of any kind. The choosing is grounded in the good pleasure of the Sovereign, and that ground is stated to be both necessary and sufficient.

II. The Unconditional Character of Election

Romans 9 and the Sovereignty of the Divine Choice

A. The Argument of Romans 9:6–16

The most sustained and exegetically demanding defense of unconditional election in the New Testament is found in Romans 9:6–23, and it demands careful attention both as a piece of theological argument and as a pastoral communication. Paul's argument in Romans 9 does not emerge from a detached interest in the theoretical

mechanics of divine sovereignty; it emerges from the anguished pastoral question of Romans 9:6, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed”, which is Paul’s response to the apparent tragedy of Israel’s widespread rejection of its own Messiah. The argument from unconditional election is, in Paul’s hands, the answer to the question: has God’s covenant word proven unreliable? And the answer is no, because God’s word was never conditioned on the ethnic or religious identity of those who received it, but on the sovereign electing purpose of the God who called.

Paul’s first argument comes from the history of the patriarchs. Within the physical offspring of Abraham, God made a distinction: “it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants” (Romans 9:8, NASB 1995). The distinction between Ishmael and Isaac was not based on any natural quality; it was based entirely on the divine promise. Paul’s second and more decisive argument comes from the case of Jacob and Esau, the twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. “For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Romans 9:11–13, NASB 1995). Paul’s exegetical argument is constructed with great care. The election of Jacob over Esau was determined before either had done anything good or bad, explicitly to exclude the possibility that the election was based on foreseen works, and it was determined in order that “God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.” The unconditional character of the election is not an inference; it is Paul’s own stated reason for citing the case.

Paul then anticipates the objection that unconditional election implies injustice in God: “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!” (Romans 9:14, NASB 1995). His response is not to soften the doctrine but to press it further, citing Exodus 33:19: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” The significance of the Exodus citation is profound: God’s declaration of the freedom of His mercy is not made in a context of abstract philosophical discussion but immediately after Israel’s catastrophic idolatry with the golden calf, a context in which the entire nation deserved condemnation and in which God’s mercy was therefore, from the human perspective, entirely unmerited by its recipients. The mercy is free because it is not earned; it is sovereign because it is distributed at God’s discretion; and the argument from Exodus 33:19 establishes that this sovereign freedom is not an aberration but the essential character of divine mercy as God Himself has disclosed it. Verse 16 then draws the conclusion that the whole passage has been building toward: “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

The structure of Paul’s argument in Romans 9:6–16 is not a philosophical deduction from the concept of divine sovereignty; it is an exegetical argument from specific historical cases in the biblical narrative, from Abraham’s two sons, from Jacob and Esau, from Moses and Pharaoh, each of which is cited as a concrete illustration of the same principle: God’s saving mercy is not distributed on the basis of anything in the creature but according to the free, sovereign, unconditional purpose of the God who calls. The student who reads Romans 9 as an abstract theological treatise on determinism has missed Paul’s pastoral and hermeneutical context entirely. This is an argument from Israel’s history, made by a Jewish apostle to a congregation with both Jewish and Gentile members, in service of the claim that the apparent failure of God’s covenant word with Israel is not a failure at all, because God’s covenant word was never a word of indiscriminate ethnic privilege but always a word of sovereign, unconditional, electing grace.

B. The Hardness of Pharaoh and the Potter's Rights

Paul's argument does not stop at verse 16. He proceeds to the case of Pharaoh, citing Exodus 9:16: "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Romans 9:17, NASB 1995). The hardening of Pharaoh is not presented as a merely permissive act, God allowing Pharaoh to do what he was already inclined to do, but as an active divine purpose in which Pharaoh's resistance was the means by which God's power was displayed and His name proclaimed to the nations. This is one of the most uncomfortable texts in the New Testament for those who resist the Reformed account of divine sovereignty, and it demands honest engagement rather than exegetical evasion.

The concluding image of the Potter and the clay in Romans 9:20–23 brings Paul's argument to its most comprehensive and most humbling expression. "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?" (Romans 9:20–21, NASB 1995). The image is drawn from Isaiah 29:16 and 45:9, and it makes the same fundamental point: the creature's relationship to the Creator is not a relationship of equals negotiating terms but a relationship of formed-thing to Former, in which the sovereignty and wisdom of the Former are not answerable to the formed-thing's preferences or sense of fairness. This is not a denial of divine goodness; it is a denial of the creature's competence to sit in judgment on the Creator's decisions. The one who objects to unconditional election on the grounds of its apparent unfairness has appointed himself as the judge of the divine will, a position that Paul's language of "who are you, O man" categorically forecloses.

The double conclusion of verses 22–23 brings the entire argument to its climactic statement: "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory." The contrasting fates of the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy serve a single unified purpose: the display of the full range of God's moral perfections, His justice in the former and His mercy in the latter, so that the richness of His glory might be known by all. Election and its counterpart do not merely accomplish the salvation of the elect; they display the complete moral character of the God in whom all perfections reside in infinite measure.

III. Election and Foreknowledge

What Does It Mean That God 'Foreknew' His People?

A. The Biblical Meaning of Divine Foreknowledge

The relationship between election and foreknowledge is one of the most exegetically contested issues in the doctrine of salvation, and getting it right is essential for understanding why election is genuinely unconditional rather than merely epistemically prior to the creature's foreseen response. The Arminian tradition has consistently argued that God's foreknowledge of who will freely choose to believe is the basis of His election of those individuals, a position sometimes called prescient election or the foreknowledge view. On this reading, Romans 8:29 ("Whom He foreknew, He also predestined") means that God looked down the corridor of time, foresaw who would freely respond to the gospel in saving faith, and then, on the basis of that foreseen faith, chose to

predestinate them. Election, on this view, is ultimately grounded in the creature's autonomous response rather than in the sovereign will of the Creator.

The Reformed response to this interpretation begins with the lexical observation that the Greek word *proginōskō*, when used with God as subject and persons (not events or facts) as the object, consistently carries the meaning of intimate, personal, covenantal knowing rather than mere cognitive foreknowledge of future events. This is the same usage as the Hebrew *yada*, which throughout the Old Testament denotes the kind of personal, relational, covenant-establishing knowledge that God has of those He has set His love upon. In Amos 3:2, God declares to Israel: "You only have I known among all the families of the earth", a statement that cannot mean mere cognitive awareness (God is omniscient) but can only mean covenantal, electing love. The same usage appears in Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb I knew you"), Hosea 13:5, and in the New Testament in Matthew 7:23 ("I never knew you", clearly not a denial of cognitive awareness but of covenantal relationship).

When Paul writes in Romans 8:29 that "whom He foreknew, He also predestined," he is using *proginōskō* in this relational, covenantal sense: those upon whom God set His eternal love are those whom He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. The foreknowledge is not the basis of the predestination; it is the personal, electing love that is the predestination's ground. This reading is confirmed by Romans 11:2, where Paul writes of Israel: "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew", clearly not meaning "the people whose future faith He merely anticipated" but "the people whom He set His covenantal love upon," the people He chose in the unconditional election of grace. And it is confirmed by 1 Peter 1:1–2, where the apostle addresses the elect as those chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father", a phrase that, in context, describes not prescience of future faith but the sovereign electing purpose of the Father.

The deeper problem with the Arminian foreknowledge view is not merely lexical but theological: it makes the divine election dependent on a faith that God Himself produces. If, as both Ephesians 2:8–9 and Philippians 1:29 explicitly state, faith is the gift of God, not the sinner's independent contribution to salvation but a gift sovereignly given by God, then God cannot coherently be said to have based His election on a foreseen faith that He Himself determined to give. The Arminian foreknowledge view requires that the faith upon which election is based be the creature's own autonomous free act, untouched by any prior sovereign determination. But this requirement directly contradicts the apostolic declaration that faith itself is a gift. If God gives the faith, He cannot then look forward to see who will have it and elect them on that basis; the giving and the electing are one and the same sovereign act. The foreknowledge view, in the end, gives back with one hand what it claims to take with the other: it says that election is based on foreseen faith, but it cannot consistently maintain that position without either denying that faith is a gift or accepting that God foresaw something He Himself determined, which is simply unconditional election under a different name.

B. The Election of the Individual and the Election of Christ

A crucial dimension of the Reformed doctrine of election that is often inadequately treated in popular discussions is the relationship between the election of the individual and the election of Jesus Christ. Election is always, in Paul's account, election "in Him", in Christ. The phrase "in Him" appears repeatedly in Ephesians 1:3–11 (vv. 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11), and it is not decorative; it is theologically load-bearing. The elect are not chosen as isolated individuals and then placed in relation to Christ; they are chosen as those who are, in the eternal purpose of God, united to Christ by faith. Christ Himself is the elect One par excellence, the "chosen" of God (Isaiah 42:1; Luke 23:35; 1 Peter

2:4), and the election of His people is their inclusion in His election. To be chosen in Christ is to be chosen to be brought into the fellowship of the One who is the Father's eternal delight.

This Christ-centered character of election has profound implications for the assurance of the believer. If election is in Christ, then the ground of the believer's confidence is not primarily the bare fact of a divine decree directed toward her as an isolated individual but her union with the One in whom the decree is grounded. She does not need to penetrate the secret counsel of God to know whether she is elect; she needs to know whether she is in Christ, whether the Spirit of Christ dwells in her (Romans 8:9), whether she has been united to Him by faith, whether the fruit of that union (love for God, love for the brethren, grief over sin, desire for holiness) is present in her life. The assurance of election is accessed through the evidence of union with Christ, not through direct insight into the divine decree. This is Calvin's great pastoral contribution to the doctrine: he consistently directed anxious souls not to the hidden decree but to Christ, in whom the decree is both made and made accessible.

IV. The Arminian Objection and the Reformed Response

Prescient Election, Foreseen Faith, and the Gift of Believing

A. The Arminian Position Stated Fairly

The Arminian doctrine of prescient election deserves a fair and precise statement before it is evaluated, both as a matter of theological honesty and because a caricatured opponent is always the easiest to defeat and the least edifying to engage. The Arminian position, in its most carefully articulated form, is not that God is merely a passive spectator of human history who then arranges His decrees around what He sees. The Arminian tradition has consistently affirmed that God's foreknowledge is not mere passive observation but an aspect of His omniscience that is fully consistent with His sovereignty. What the Arminian tradition insists is that God's sovereign choice of who will be saved is exercised through His omniscient foreknowledge of each person's free response to the gospel, that God elects those whom He foreknows will freely choose to believe, not as a limitation of His sovereignty but as a specification of how His sovereignty operates in the domain of human free will.

The Arminian tradition has also developed the concept of prevenient grace, a universal, resistible grace that partially restores the moral capacity of the fallen will, enabling every person who hears the gospel to respond in genuine faith or to genuinely resist, as the mechanism by which the human response that grounds election is made possible without eliminating the fall's effects. On this account, God's election is not based on the natural capacity of the unregenerate but on the response enabled by prevenient grace, a response that is real, free, and not predetermined. The careful Arminian theologian will insist that this position does not make salvation dependent on unaided human merit but on a grace-enabled free response that God then honors with the further grace of election and regeneration. The difference between this position and the Reformed position is, on this account, not a difference about the necessity of grace but about whether the decisive grace is resistible or irresistible, universal or particular.

The Reformed engagement with the Arminian position at this point is most profitable when it addresses the Arminian account on its strongest ground: not by dismissing it as Pelagianism (which the careful Arminian will rightly deny) but by pressing the question of what makes the difference between the person who responds to prevenient grace with faith and the person who resists it. On the Arminian account, this difference is ultimately

located in the free choice of the human will, uncaused by anything in God's sovereign determination. Two people receive the same prevenient grace; one believes and one does not. The difference between them, in the final analysis, is something in themselves rather than something in God. And this means, however the Arminian frames it, that the ultimate ground of the distinction between the saved and the unsaved is the human will rather than the divine will. The elect are those who made the right choice; the non-elect are those who made the wrong one. And however grace-assisted that choice may be, the decisive credit for getting it right belongs to the creature.

B. The Fatal Flaw: Faith as the Gift of God

The decisive Reformed response to the prescient election view is the one that the outline of this lesson states with admirable conciseness: if faith itself is a gift of God, then God cannot be said to have foreseen what He Himself determined to produce. The evidence that faith is a gift is not a single contested proof text but a convergent line of apostolic testimony. Ephesians 2:8–9 is the most famous: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” The grammatical question of whether “it” refers to faith specifically or to the whole of salvation has been extensively debated, but the point is moot for the present argument: even if “it” refers to the entire salvation rather than to faith specifically, the passage explicitly excludes the sinner's own contribution from the procurement of salvation and places it entirely in the category of divine gift.

More directly, Philippians 1:29 states plainly: “For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (NASB 1995). The verb “has been granted” (*echaristhē*, from *charizomai*, to give as a gift of grace) makes the gift character of believing explicit and unavoidable. Believing, faith, has been granted, given as a gracious gift, for Christ's sake. Paul is not describing the result of faith (as if the privileges of the Christian life, including suffering, were the granted thing); he is describing faith itself as the granted gift. The same testimony appears in Acts 13:48, where Luke describes the response to Paul's preaching in Pisidian Antioch: “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” The aorist passive participle “hadbeenappointed” (*tētetagēmenoi*, from *tassō*) describes a prior divine appointment that produces faith, not a divine recognition of faith that produces appointment.

The logical consequence of these texts for the foreknowledge view is clear and inescapable: if God gives faith, then the faith He foresees in those whom He elects is not an independent human act that preceded and grounded the election; it is a divinely determined gift that the election itself ordained. The God who elects is the same God who gives the faith He foresees, and the sequence of divine acts (election, then the giving of faith as the fruit of election) is the exact opposite of the Arminian sequence (foreseeing of faith, then election on that basis). The Arminian view, pushed to its logical conclusion, requires a faith that is independent of divine determination, a faith that the creature produces from its own resources even if assisted by prevenient grace. And the apostolic testimony that faith is a gift, freely and sovereignly given, decisively forecloses that requirement.

V. Further Biblical Testimony to Unconditional Election

John 15:16, Acts 13:48, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13

A. *You Did Not Choose Me, but I Chose You*

The Johannine testimony to unconditional election is concentrated in a single verse that is among the clearest statements of the doctrine in the entire New Testament. In John 15:16, Jesus addresses His disciples in the most direct possible terms: “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you” (NASB 1995). The structure of the declaration is a direct, personal, first-person correction of a potential misunderstanding about the origin of the disciples’ relationship with Christ. “You did not choose Me”, the initiative was not theirs. “I chose you”, the initiative was His. The election is His act, directed toward them, and it precedes, grounds, and produces everything else in their discipleship: their appointment to fruitfulness, the permanence of their fruit, and their access to the Father in prayer.

The context of John 15:16 is the Farewell Discourse, which Jesus delivers on the night of His arrest to the eleven disciples who will remain with Him. These are men who have already been following Jesus for three years, who have already been designated as apostles, who have already confessed Him as the Christ. Yet Jesus says to them, in this moment of intimate final instruction: “You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” Whatever choices these men made in the course of their discipleship, and they made many, real, genuine choices, those choices were not the ultimate origin of their relationship with Christ. He chose them first. The choosing that matters, the choosing that grounds their entire standing before God, the choosing from which all fruit flows, that choosing is His, not theirs.

The verb translated “chose” in John 15:16 is *exelaxamen*, the same root as the *exelaxato* of Ephesians 1:4. The lexical and conceptual continuity between the two texts is unmistakable: the same sovereign, personal, selecting divine choice that Paul places “before the foundation of the world” in Ephesians 1:4 is the same choice that Jesus claims in John 15:16 as the ground of the disciples’ relationship to Him. Election is not a Pauline theological system constructed from abstract principles; it is the explicit self-testimony of Jesus Christ about the origin of His people’s relationship with Him. The One who said “I chose you” is the Son of God, and the doctrine of unconditional election is His own declaration about how His people came to be His people.

B. *As Many As Had Been Appointed to Eternal Life Believed*

Acts 13:48 provides what is perhaps the clearest narrative illustration of unconditional election in the entire New Testament, precisely because it describes the same event, a Pauline gospel proclamation with a divided response, from two different perspectives simultaneously. Luke writes that when Paul’s gospel preaching in Pisidian Antioch produced a mixed response among the Gentile audience, “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” The Greek verb *tētetagēmenoi* (perfect passive participle of *tassō*) is in the perfect passive, indicating a prior, completed appointment to eternal life that existed before the believing occurred. Those who believed were those who had been appointed; the appointment preceded and produced the believing, not the reverse.

The grammar of the verse makes the Arminian reading essentially impossible to sustain without forcing the text to say the opposite of what it plainly says. If the Arminian foreknowledge view were correct, the text should read “as many as believed had been appointed to eternal life”, faith first, then appointment as a divine response to that faith. But the text reads: those who had been appointed to eternal life believed. The appointment is logically prior to the faith; the faith is the result of the appointment, not its ground. The ones who believed were precisely

and exactly those who had been appointed, no more and no fewer, and the appointment was prior, passive (not self-produced), and perfect (complete and settled before the event of believing).

2 Thessalonians 2:13 provides the Pauline parallel: “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” (NASB 1995). The election is from the beginning, *ap’ archēs*, from the first, a phrase that in this context points to the pre-temporal divine purpose. The means of salvation (sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth) are the divinely appointed instruments through which the pre-temporal election reaches its fulfillment in time, not the conditions that ground the election. Faith and sanctification are “throughout” or “by means of” (Greek: *en*) the election’s execution, not prior to and independent of it. The structure confirms the Reformed *ordo*: election first in the divine purpose, then faith and sanctification as the Spirit’s application of that election in time.

VI. The Effects and Purposes of Election

What This Doctrine Does and Does Not Produce in the Believer

A. What Election Is Designed to Produce

The Reformed tradition has consistently insisted, against caricatures from every direction, that the doctrine of unconditional election is not designed to produce arrogance, complacency, or indifference in those who receive it. It is designed to produce precisely the opposite, and the evidence for this claim is not a matter of theological inference but of explicit apostolic statement. In Ephesians 1:6, the refrain that Paul attaches to his account of election is “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” The election of grace is designed to produce the praise of the glory of grace. Not pride in the elect. Not disdain for the non-elect. Not theological smugness about being on the right side of the divine decree. The praise of the glory of His grace, the wholehearted, astonished, sustained adoration of the God whose grace chose when it could have condemned, predestined when it could have abandoned, and bestowed when it could have withheld.

The purpose of election stated in the decree itself is also directly opposed to any interpretation that would produce arrogance. Ephesians 1:4 states that the elect were chosen “that we would be holy and blameless before Him.” The purpose of election is holiness, not privilege; conformity to Christ, not superiority over others. The person who receives the doctrine of election rightly, who understands that she was chosen not because of anything in her but solely by the good pleasure of God, has had every rational ground for pride systematically demolished. There is no quality in you that made you worth choosing. There is no merit in you that distinguished you from the non-elect. The only explanation for the fact that you believe, where others who heard the same gospel did not, is the sovereign grace of God who gave you the faith that you could not produce yourself. Received in this way, election does not puff up; it lays the soul flat before the God whose grace is the only explanation for everything it has received.

The doctrine of election also produces, in those who receive it with spiritual seriousness, the most stable and grounded assurance of salvation available to the human soul. Not the presumptuous confidence that one has checked the right doctrinal boxes, but the covenantally grounded confidence that the God who loved you with an electing love before the foundation of the world is not going to change His mind. Paul’s rhetorical question in

Romans 8:33, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies”, draws its force entirely from the doctrine of election: the elect are those whose standing before God is grounded in the immutable purpose of the One who both chose them and justifies them. The same God who decreed their election is the God who pronounces the justifying verdict, and no charge brought against those whom He has both chosen and justified can stand.

Election is also the indispensable motivational foundation for world mission. If God has a people yet to be gathered from every tribe and tongue and nation, a specific people given to the Son in the eternal covenant of redemption and appointed to eternal life, then the proclamation of the gospel is not a venture of uncertain outcome but the ordained means by which the certain purpose of God is executed. The missionaries who have historically been most devoted to the most difficult fields of world evangelization, William Carey in India, Adoniram Judson in Burma, David Brainerd among the Native Americans, were, with remarkable consistency, men whose confidence in the sovereignty of God in election was the fuel for rather than the hindrance to their evangelistic labors. We will return to this point at length in Lesson 7.

B. The Mystery, Humility, and Pastoral Use of Election

The doctrine of election must be held with a humility that matches its grandeur. Paul’s response in Romans 9:20, “Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?”, is directed not only against those who object to the doctrine but against those who would treat its conclusions with a glib self-assurance. The doctrine of unconditional election places the believer in the position of the one who was passed by in the street and given life when he deserved death, a position from which the only appropriate posture is gratitude, not superiority. The believer who finds herself looking down on those who have not yet received the gospel with a confidence rooted in her own election has deeply misunderstood what election is: it is the grace of the God who loves the undeserving, and its proper fruit is love for the undeserving, not contempt.

The mystery of election, the fact that it cannot be fully explained in terms that satisfy every human intuition about fairness and love, must also be honestly acknowledged. Romans 11:33–36 comes at the end of Paul’s most sustained and careful treatment of divine election (Romans 9–11), and it concludes not with a neat resolution of all the tensions the preceding chapters have generated but with a doxological exclamation of wonder before the unsearchable depths of the divine wisdom: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” (Romans 11:33–34, NASB 1995). The appropriate response to what cannot be fully comprehended is not rationalistic reduction but worshipful wonder.

The pastoral use of the doctrine requires a combination of theological precision and pastoral tenderness that is not always easy to maintain. Preached well, the doctrine of election is one of the most powerful instruments in the pastor’s arsenal for the comfort of anxious souls, the humbling of proud ones, and the grounding of every believer’s assurance in something more stable than the quality of their own spiritual performance. Preached poorly, with a cold, mechanical precision that strips it of its doxological purpose and pastoral warmth, it can produce precisely the opposite effects: anxiety in those who cannot find their names in the secret decree, pride in those who have concluded that their election makes them spiritually superior, and a missional lethargy in those who have allowed the sovereignty of God to become an excuse for the neglect of gospel proclamation. The doctrine must always be preached in its apostolic context, as the backstory of the grace that produces worship,

the ground of the assurance that enables endurance, and the fuel of the missionary confidence that sends the church to the ends of the earth.

“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.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”

Romans 9:13–16, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Unconditional Election	God's eternal, sovereign, personal choice of specific individuals for salvation, made solely according to the good pleasure of His own will and not conditioned upon anything foreseen in those individuals, not foreseen faith, not foreseen obedience, not foreseen merit of any kind. Unconditional election is grounded in God Himself, not in anything in the creature (Ephesians 1:4–5; Romans 9:11–16; 2 Timothy 1:9). The "U" of the TULIP acronym summarizing the Canons of Dort. Distinguished from conditional or prescient election, which grounds the choice in God's foreknowledge of the creature's foreseen faith.
Prescient Election	The Arminian doctrine that God's election of individuals to salvation is based on His omniscient foreknowledge of who will freely choose to believe in response to the gospel, either under prevenient grace or through natural free will. On the prescient election view, God does not choose people because He makes them believe; He chooses people because He foresees that they will believe. The Reformed critique: if faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29), then God cannot base His election on a foreseen faith that He Himself determines to give. Prescient election grounds the ultimate distinction between saved and unsaved in the human will rather than in the divine will.
Predestination	The divine appointment of those whom God has elected to a specific end, in the case of election, to conformity to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) and adoption as sons through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:5). Predestination is the purposive dimension of election: God did not merely choose people to save in a generic sense; He appointed them to a specific destiny of Christlikeness and eternal filial relationship with the Father. Election selects; predestination appoints to an end. The term is also used more broadly to encompass both the election of the individual and the divine appointment to the end for which they are elected.
Proginoskō	Greek: "to foreknow." The verb used in Romans 8:29 ("whom He foreknew, He also predestined") and Romans 11:2 ("God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew"). When used with God as subject and persons as the object, proginoskō carries the meaning of intimate, covenantal, electing love rather than mere cognitive foreknowledge of future events, the same sense as the Hebrew yada (Amos 3:2; Jeremiah 1:5). The Reformed exegesis holds that "whom He foreknew" in Romans 8:29 means "upon whom He set His electing love," not "whose future faith He merely anticipated."
Eklogō	Greek: "choosing out," "election." The noun form (eklogē) appears in Romans 9:11 ("god's purpose according to His choice"), Romans 11:5 ("a remnant according to God's gracious choice"), 11:7, 28, 1 Thessalonians 1:4, and 2 Peter 1:10. The verb (eklegomai, eklegō) appears in Ephesians 1:4 ("He chose us in Him"), John 15:16 ("I chose you"), and Acts 13:17. The compound prefix ek (out of, from among) makes the selectivity of the divine choice explicit: God chose some from within the larger group of humanity, not all.
In Christ	The Pauline phrase (Greek: en Christō or en autō) that describes the sphere or ground of every spiritual blessing, including election: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). Election is not a bare decree directed toward isolated individuals; it is the Father's choice of a people in vital union with the Son, as members of the body of which He is the Head. The elect are not first chosen and then placed in relation to Christ; they are chosen in Christ, as those whose election is inseparable from their appointed union with the One in whom all spiritual blessings are located.
Preterition	The act of passing over, in the doctrine of election, the sovereign divine decision to leave certain individuals in the condemnation of sin rather than choosing them for salvation. Preterition is the negative side of the single divine act of election: to elect some is necessarily

	to pass over others. In the infralapsarian formulation, preterition is a sovereign act of will (not of justice), while the condemnation of the non-elect is a just act based on their actual sin (not on their not being elected). Preterition will be treated in full detail in Lesson 6 (Reprobation).
Infralapsarianism	The theological position (from Latin: infra lapsum, “below the fall”) that God’s decree of election and reprobation logically follows and presupposes His decree to create and to permit the fall, so that the objects of election and reprobation are considered as fallen sinners rather than as mere creatable persons. On the infralapsarian view, election is the sovereign choice to save some from the fallen mass, and reprobation is the just decision to leave others in their condemnation. The majority position of the Reformed confessions (Westminster, Heidelberg) is infralapsarian. Contrasted with supralapsarianism (election logically prior to the decrees of creation and fall).
Supralapsarianism	The theological position (from Latin: supra lapsum, “above the fall”) that God’s decree of election and reprobation is logically prior to His decrees to create and to permit the fall, that the objects of election are considered as mere creatable persons rather than as fallen sinners. Associated with Beza, Gomarus, and the high Calvinist tradition. More rigorously maintains the priority of God’s saving purpose over all other divine decrees. Critiqued (by infralapsarians) for making God the direct author of sin and for making reprobation as unconditional as election. A minority position within confessional Reformed theology.
Mass of Perdition	Latin: massa perditionis or massa damnata, Augustine’s term for the entire human race in its fallen condition, regarded as a uniformly condemned mass from which God sovereignly rescues some by grace and leaves others to their just condemnation. The concept emphasizes both the universal desert of condemnation (no one in the fallen mass deserves to be saved) and the pure graciousness of election (those who are saved are saved from a mass that deserved nothing but condemnation). The term grounds the Reformed insistence that election is pure grace, not a response to any relative virtue in the elect, since the entire mass is equally deserving of condemnation.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the ultimate explanation for the fact that we are Christians, that we believe, while others who heard the same gospel did not; that we love God, while our natural hearts were oriented entirely away from Him; that we have the spiritual life that makes repentance and faith possible, while apart from grace we were dead in trespasses and sins, is not anything in us. It is the sovereign, unconditional, free election of the God who, before the foundation of the world, chose us in Christ according to the kind intention of His will. We must believe this not as a doctrinal proposition that we affirm at arm's length but as the true account of our own existence as Christians. The story of how we came to faith is not a story about our spiritual responsiveness, our religious sincerity, or our wise exercise of free will. It is a story about sovereign grace that found us dead and made us alive, blind and made us see, resistant and made us willing.

We must also believe, with equal conviction, that the doctrine of unconditional election is not logically incompatible with genuine human responsibility, the sincere gospel offer to all, or the moral accountability of those who reject it. These two truths, divine sovereignty in election and genuine human responsibility in belief and unbelief, are both taught by the same apostle in the same letters, often in the same paragraphs. Romans 9 presents the sovereignty of election in its most uncompromising form and immediately follows it, in Romans 10–11, with the most urgent call to gospel proclamation and the most earnest expression of Paul's own anguish for those who have not believed. The apostolic mind holds both truths without collapsing either into the other, and the theological mind that has been formed by the apostolic testimony will follow suit.

We must believe, thirdly, that election in Christ has a specific moral purpose: that we would be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1:4). The doctrine of election is never, in the apostolic teaching, a license for moral indolence. It is the divine appointment to a specific moral destiny, conformity to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29), and the certainty of that appointment is the most powerful motivating force for the pursuit of holiness that the Christian life possesses. The person who has understood that God chose him for holiness before the foundation of the world has been given the most profound possible reason to pursue it: not to earn favor he already possesses, but to live out the destiny to which he has been eternally appointed.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The primary emotional register that the doctrine of election should produce in the believing soul is wonder, not the mild intellectual appreciation of an elegant theological argument, but the soul-shaking, pride-demolishing, worship-generating wonder of someone who has looked into the eternal past and discovered that she was there, in the mind of God, before the world was made; that the love that found her in time was a love that knew her name in eternity; and that there is no explanation for the grace she has received other than the free, sovereign, inexplicable, electing pleasure of a God who chose her when she deserved nothing and gave her everything. This is the wonder that Paul's doxology of Romans 11:33–36 expresses, not the satisfied admiration of a theologian who has solved a difficult problem, but the breathless adoration of an apostle who has spent three chapters looking into the depths of divine sovereignty and come out the other side unable to say anything other than: "Oh, the depth! How unsearchable! How unfathomable! To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Desire the humility that the doctrine produces in those who receive it honestly. The believer who has understood unconditional election has had her natural pride systematically dismantled at its foundation. There is nothing in her that made her worth choosing. There is no quality, no decision, no spiritual sensitivity that distinguished her from those who were not chosen. The election was unconditional, which means that whatever condition might have commended her, her election did not depend on it. Receive this, and let it work. Let it work in your prayer, producing a posture of pure receptivity before a God who gives what you cannot earn. Let it work in your relationships, producing a love for others that is grounded not in their deserving but in the sovereign grace that loves the undeserving. And let it work in your mission, producing a compassion for the lost that is not the condescension of the already-arrived toward the not-yet-chosen, but the gratitude of one beggar who has found bread and cannot rest until every other beggar has been told where to find it.

Desire, above all, the settled, unshakeable assurance that the doctrine of election produces when it is received in its proper Christ-centered frame. You are not elect in the abstract; you are elect in Christ. Your assurance is not the product of gazing into the hidden decree of God but of knowing that you are in the One in whom all the blessings of election reside. The question “Am I elect?” is answered by the question “Am I in Christ?”, and the evidence for that is not a private revelation from the decretive will of God but the public, Spirit-testable fruit of union with Christ: faith, love, repentance, holiness, perseverance. Let the doctrine produce in you not anxious introspection into the unknowable but joyful examination of the very knowable evidence of the Spirit’s work in your soul.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Romans 9:1–23 in one sitting, as a unified argument, noting the movement from Paul’s own anguish for Israel (vv. 1–5) through the exegetical argument from Abraham’s sons (vv. 6–9), to Jacob and Esau (vv. 10–13), to Moses and Pharaoh (vv. 14–18), to the potter and the clay (vv. 19–23). For each step, identify the specific biblical text Paul cites, the argument he makes from it, and the objection he anticipates. Ask: does Paul’s argument throughout this chapter establish unconditional election as the teaching of the Old Testament itself, not merely as a Pauline innovation? And how does the pastoral context of the question (has God’s word failed with respect to Israel?) shape the way the doctrine functions in the passage?
- Trace the word “chosen” or “elect” through the New Testament using a concordance or Bible software (Greek: *eklogē*, *eklektos*, *eklegomai*). For each occurrence, note: Who does the choosing? On what basis is the choosing described or implied? What is the purpose of the choosing stated or implied? What response does the author expect the doctrine to produce in the reader? After completing this survey, ask: does the cumulative weight of the New Testament’s election language support the unconditional or the conditional (prescient) interpretation? Which reading makes better sense of the whole canonical picture?
- Engage the Arminian objection to unconditional election by reading a fair and careful statement of the prescient election view, such as Roger Olson’s *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* or Jack Cottrell’s article on foreknowledge and election, and then reading the best Reformed response available, such as Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware’s *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* or John Piper’s *The Justification of God* (on Romans 9). After reading both sides with genuine attention, evaluate: which reading does more justice to the full range of relevant texts? Which account of foreknowledge better fits Paul’s use of *proginoskō* in Romans 8:29 and 11:2? And which answer to the question “Why do some believe and others not?” is more consistent with the apostolic declaration that faith is a gift?
- Memorize Ephesians 1:4–6 in the NASB 1995 and spend one week meditating on the three phrases that structure the passage: “before the foundation of the world” (the eternity of the election), “according to the

kind intention of His will” (the unconditioned freedom of the election), and “to the praise of the glory of His grace” (the doxological purpose of the election). For each phrase, ask: what does this say about God? What does this say about me? What does this produce in my heart? And write a brief prayer for each meditation that expresses the specific gratitude, humility, or worship that the phrase generates.

- Have a genuine, honest conversation with someone in your spiritual community who struggles with the doctrine of unconditional election, someone who finds it unfair, cold, or threatening. Listen carefully to their objection before responding. Identify whether the objection is primarily intellectual (a claim that the doctrine cannot be reconciled with divine goodness or human responsibility), emotional (a reaction to the felt unfairness of the doctrine), or pastoral (a concern that the doctrine produces anxiety or complacency). Then respond to the specific objection they have actually raised, using the exegetical and pastoral resources this lesson has provided, with the patience and warmth of someone who remembers that she was once on the other side of the same argument.

Key Texts: *Ephesians 1:3–11; Romans 8:29–33; 9:6–24; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Philippians 1:29; Romans 11:33–36*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging this lesson, what has been your prior relationship with the doctrine of election? Have you encountered it as a comfort, a challenge, or a threat to your understanding of God's character? If you have previously rejected or resisted the doctrine of unconditional election, what was the primary basis of your resistance, exegetical (a belief that the texts do not teach it), theological (a conviction that it is incompatible with divine goodness), or emotional (a sense that it is unfair or cold)? Being honest about the source of any resistance is the necessary first step toward engaging the doctrine on its own terms.

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Ephesians 1:3–11 carefully. In verse 4, what three things does Paul say about the act of choosing: (1) who does it, (2) when it occurred, and (3) in what sphere or medium was it done? In verse 5, what is stated as the ground of the predestination ("according to the ____ of His will")? In verse 6, what does Paul state as the ultimate purpose of the election and predestination? How do these three observations together establish the unconditional character of the election?
- Read Romans 9:10–16 carefully. What specific features of the Jacob-Esau case does Paul identify as evidence that God's election is not based on foreseen works (v. 11)? What does he state as the purpose of this arrangement ("so that...", v. 11)? In verse 12, what is explicitly excluded as the basis of the election ("not because of works, but...")? What is stated as its actual basis? In verses 15–16, what does the Exodus citation establish about the character of divine mercy? And what does verse 16 state as the logical conclusion of the entire argument?
- Read John 15:16. What is the grammatical structure of the verse, specifically, which clause is negated and which is affirmed? Who is the subject of each clause? What does Jesus say was the purpose of His choosing ("that you would...")? And what does He promise as the result of the choosing for the disciples' prayer life? How does this verse address the question of whether the disciples' faith was the cause or the effect of Christ's election of them?
- Read Acts 13:48. What is the grammatical form of the participle translated "had been appointed" (Greek: *tētetagēmenoi*)? What does the perfect passive form indicate about the timing and agency of the appointment? In the verse as Luke has written it, which comes first: the appointment or the believing? How does the grammar of the verse compare with what the prescient election view would require the grammar to say?
- Read 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2–3. In 2 Timothy 1:9, what does Paul say God's calling is not according to ("not according to our ____")? What does he say it is according to ("according to His own ____")? When was this grace granted (Greek: *pro chronon aionion*)? In Titus 1:2–3, when does Paul say the promise of eternal life was made ("promised ____")? To whom was this promise made if it was made before the ages began? How do these two texts together establish the pre-temporal and unconditional character of the saving grace?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the Greek verb *proginoskō* (foreknow), when used with God as subject and persons as the object, carries the meaning of covenantal, electing love rather than mere cognitive foreknowledge of

future events. Evaluate this claim from the following texts: Romans 8:29 (“whom He foreknew, He also predestined”), Romans 11:2 (“God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew”), Amos 3:2 (Hebrew: *yada*, translated “known” in the NASB), Jeremiah 1:5 (“before I formed you in the womb I knew you”), and Matthew 7:23 (“I never knew you”). Does the relational, covenantal sense of “knowing” fit better than the cognitive-foreknowledge sense in each of these contexts? And if *proginoskō* means covenantal electing love in Romans 8:29, what are the implications for the Arminian foreknowledge view?

- The lesson argues that the fatal flaw in the Arminian prescient election view is that it makes election dependent on a faith that God Himself produces, creating an incoherence: God cannot base His election on a foreseen faith that He Himself determined to give. Evaluate this argument. Does the Arminian tradition have a response to this critique, specifically, can it coherently maintain that God foresees freely chosen faith while also affirming that faith is a gift of God? How do Ephesians 2:8–9, Philippians 1:29, and Acts 13:48 bear on this question? And if these texts establish that faith is a divine gift, what follows for the prescient election view?
- The lesson identifies four affirmations that constitute the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election: it is personal and specific, eternal, sovereign, and unconditional. It also identifies three things that election is not: it is not fatalism, not arbitrary, and not the negation of human responsibility. How does each of the four positive affirmations relate to the biblical texts surveyed in this lesson? And how does each of the three negative clarifications guard the doctrine against specific misunderstandings or misuses? Which of the negative clarifications do you find most important for addressing the most common objections you encounter?
- The lesson argues that the doctrine of election produces neither arrogance nor complacency in those who receive it rightly, but rather the praise of the glory of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:6), humility before the God who chose the undeserving, and motivation for holiness as the appointed purpose of the election (Ephesians 1:4). Evaluate these claims pastorally. Is this the typical effect you observe when the doctrine of election is preached and received? If not, what goes wrong in the reception? What specific pastoral or homiletical failures tend to produce the negative effects (arrogance, complacency, anxiety) rather than the positive ones?
- The lesson argues that election “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:4) means that the believer’s assurance of election is accessed not by gazing into the hidden decree but by examining the evidence of union with Christ. How does this Christ-centered account of the assurance of election compare with the anxiety-producing approaches that have sometimes attended the doctrine in certain Puritan and post-Puritan pastoral traditions? What specific fruit of union with Christ does the New Testament identify as the evidence of genuine election (1 John 2:29; 3:9, 14; 5:1–4; Romans 8:16)? And how does directing the anxious soul to examine this fruit rather than to penetrate the secret decree both honor the biblical data and serve the pastoral purpose of producing settled assurance?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson opens with the observation that unconditional election is the doctrine against which fallen human nature reacts with the most predictable and persistent hostility, “because it deprives the human creature of the one thing that the fallen will most desperately wants to retain: the credit for its own salvation.” Evaluate this claim honestly in relation to your own response to the doctrine. Is there a part of you that wants to retain some credit for your own believing, some residual sense that your faith is ultimately your own achievement rather than God’s gift? If so, how does the apostolic testimony of Ephesians 2:8–9,

Philippians 1:29, and Acts 13:48 address that residual instinct? And what would it mean to let go of that credit entirely and receive everything as gift?

- The lesson argues that unconditional election is the foundational motivational basis for world mission: God has a people yet to be gathered, and the proclamation of the gospel is the ordained means by which they are reached. Does this understanding of election motivate or impede your own evangelistic practice? If it impedes, trace the logic carefully: is the impediment the doctrine itself or a misapplication of it (such as the hyper-Calvinist inference that we need not preach because God will save His people without our proclamation)? How does Acts 18:9–10, where the Lord tells Paul to keep speaking “because I have many people in this city,” model the relationship between election and evangelistic urgency that the Reformed tradition has consistently advocated?
- The lesson closes Section VI with the observation that election must always be preached in its apostolic context, as the backstory of grace that produces worship, the ground of assurance that enables endurance, and the fuel of missionary confidence that sends the church to the ends of the earth. Evaluate the preaching you have received or offered on this subject. Has it been preached in this apostolic context, or has it been treated as an abstract doctrinal puzzle, a basis for theological distinctiveness, or a test of Calvinist orthodoxy? What would it look like for this doctrine to be preached in such a way that it actually produces the effects Paul describes in Ephesians 1:6, the praise of the glory of God’s grace?
- The doctrine of election has sometimes been described as the comfort of the saints. John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, consistently directed anxious souls to Christ rather than to the hidden decree as the locus of their assurance. Have you personally experienced the doctrine of election as a comfort, or has it been a source of anxiety? If the latter: what specific misunderstanding of the doctrine produced the anxiety, and how does the Christ-centered account of the assurance of election (examining the evidence of union with Christ rather than gazing into the hidden decree) address that anxiety? Write a paragraph articulating how you would use the doctrine of election to comfort a genuinely anxious believer who is questioning whether she is truly saved.

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading Ephesians 1:3–11 as a doxology rather than as a doctrinal text, that is, read it as an act of worship rather than as material for theological analysis. Let Paul's breathless, clause-piling, ever-ascending praise carry you upward toward the God who is being glorified in it. Note the structure of his praise: every blessing flows from God to us (not from us to God); every blessing has its ground in the divine choice, not the human response; and the whole magnificent movement of grace terminates, three times, in the same place: the praise of the glory of God's grace. Read it until you feel the cumulative weight of what is being declared, and then, before you do anything else, simply praise God for the grace that chose you when you deserved to be passed over.

Pray with specific, personal gratitude for the doctrine's content. Thank the Father for choosing you in Christ before the foundation of the world, a choice made before you existed, before you sinned, before you could commend yourself by any quality or decision. Thank Him that His choosing was according to the kind intention of His will and not according to any condition in you, because this means that the condition could not subsequently be removed and the election thereby undone. Thank Him that the purpose of His choosing was conformity to the image of His Son, that the love that elected you is a love that wants to make you like the One it loves most, and that the goal to which you have been predestined is the most glorious destiny a human creature can be appointed to: to bear the family likeness of the eternal Son of God.

Pray with honest self-examination. Ask the Spirit to examine your heart and reveal whether the evidence of union with Christ is genuinely present: genuine faith in Christ alone, genuine repentance from sin, genuine love for God and His people, genuine growth in holiness however imperfect and uneven. If the evidence is present, receive it as the Spirit's testimony to your election, not as a proof of personal merit but as the mark of sovereign grace at work in your soul. If the evidence is absent or unclear, bring that absence to God honestly and ask the Spirit to do the work that only He can do: to regenerate, to call, to seal, to sanctify. The doctrine of election does not render this prayer redundant; it grounds the confidence with which it is offered, because the God to whom you pray is the God who gives regeneration as a sovereign gift to those He has purposed to call.

Pray for those in your life who have not yet believed, family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors whose names you have been carrying before God for months or years without visible result. Pray for them with the theological realism of one who knows that only God can open blind eyes and soften hardened hearts, that the sovereign grace that found you dead and made you alive is the only power that can do the same for them. But pray also with the confidence that the God who is sovereign in salvation is the same God who commands you to pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1–4) and who assures you that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). Hold both truths in the same prayer: the sovereignty that alone can save and the compassion that genuinely desires to.

Close with a corporate declaration of Romans 11:33–36, the doxology that Paul offers after three chapters of the most careful and demanding theological argument about election and the purposes of God in history: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (NASB 1995). Speak it as those who have spent this lesson gazing into the depths of the same wisdom and knowledge that Paul is adoring, who have seen enough to know that the depths are real

and that the appropriate response to what cannot be fully comprehended is not rationalistic reduction but worshipful wonder. This is where the doctrine of election always ends, when it is received as Paul intended it to be received: not in theological pride, not in pastoral anxiety, not in systematic self-congratulation, but in the face-down adoration of creatures whose only boast is the God whose grace is greater than all their understanding.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33, 36, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Ephesians 1:3–11; Romans 8:29–33; 9:6–24; 11:33–36; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Philippians 1:29

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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