

Our Salvation Story, Election

We are in a new series entitled Our Salvation Story. We have divided our series into three parts; what God does for us before salvation, what He does for us at the point of Salvation, and what does for us after we are saved. The past two weeks we have been looking at what God does before we are saved and have tried to answer the question as to why some are saved, and some are not. And as a corollary, for those of us who are saved, what is it that went into that process? In other words what happened to us to allow for faith?

To answer these two questions, I proposed that we needed to understand five theological concepts. The first was knowing something about God's will, then second, knowing something about our will, third, knowing what foreknowledge is, fourth, knowing what predestination is, and lastly, understanding the doctrine of election. Today we will examine election but first, a quick review of these four other important concepts.

I likened these first four concepts to ingredients in making a dish. We put each in a bowl to later mix in the pan of election to come up with an answer to our two questions. For review,

- a. Bowl #1, God's will: his preferred will, his prescribed and proscribed will, his sovereign will
- b. Bowl #2, Our will: like God we have a preferred, prescribed, proscribed, and sovereign will. However, because of the fall, our decision-making machinery usually places self-interest at the center of our decision-making process. Yet, despite our fallenness, God's sovereign will for our lives co-exists with our free will, to accomplish His purposes.
- c. Bowl #3, Foreknowledge: this is the concept that God knows everything beforehand. In other words, before the world began, and taking our free will into account, God knew every choice of every human being, yet He planned out the course of history to fulfill his purpose for it. Foreknowledge, then, refers to God knowing in advance that we would exist, how we would live, and what choices we would make.
- a. Bowl #4, Predestination: The word predestination means to lay out where you are going beforehand. Compared to foreknowledge, predestination is used to refer to a determination made before its actual coming to pass and which carried with it the power to make it come to pass. In other words, Predestination is the certainty that everything will happen according to God's purposeful plan. Foreknowledge and Predestination are intertwined. For example, through foreknowledge God saw that Adam would fall and as a result predestinated man's reconciliation through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and predestined that Christ would go to the cross (1 P 1:20). Now notice I put these in a linear relationship (i.e. foreknowledge led to predestination) as it is easier to understand, but God's ways are not our ways, and these concepts co-exist with one another simultaneously. The NT notes four things that are predestined: Christ's death and resurrection, the church, our adoption as sons and daughters, and our conformity to be Christlike.

Here is another way to think about these things and I will readily admit it is not a perfect example, but it may help. Recently, my beloved and I went to Phoenix to see our son Houston. We like to walk and hike. Before we flew down there, I had looked on a map for there are many possibilities when considering

where to go to hike, but I wanted to go to Lost Dutchman State Park in the Superstition Mountains. This is an example of foreknowledge. God knew all the choices I could make and the choice I did make. We then flew to Phoenix, got in the car and drove to Lost Dutchman State Park. That was an example of predestination. I had determined beforehand to go there and did.

Now let us get back to where we left off last week. Remember our question. How is it that some are saved and some are not? And for those of us who are saved, what went into bringing us to faith? We know God had predestined believers to be cleansed by Christ's redeeming sacrifice, that God would place all believers into his body, the church, that He would adopt us as sons and daughters, and He will conform us to His son's image. The Bible also makes clear those who don't believe will be judged. So, we have two groups with two different destinies. How is each group chosen?

We come now to the doctrine of election where, hopefully, we can put all these ingredients together and see the big picture, even if it is imperfect because of our limited human capacity.

Election

- a. "Elect" means chosen. "Election" refers to a choice or selection.
- b. There are two Theological views of Election. These two views stemmed from a theological disagreement between two well-known Reformation theologians: John Calvin and Jacob Arminius. These views are based on how you would answer the following question (from Andy Naselli) On what basis did God choose to save some individuals? Rm 8:29 states, *for those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified, those he justified, he also glorified.* 1 P 1:1, *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,* ² *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.* Note both verses say we are chosen because of God's foreknowledge, and indeed, both views agree foreknowledge is the basis upon which God chooses (or elects) certain individuals to salvation. But the difference between them is how each defines foreknowledge.
 1. The Unconditional view. This view was developed by Calvin (and his followers) and defines foreknowledge as foreloving. In other words, God intimately knew, loved, and committed himself to certain individuals before they even existed. This view is called unconditional because there are no conditions which a person must fulfill since God's choice is sovereign and not in any way affected by what that person does. In other words, specific individuals choose to trust God because God first chose them. In the unconditional view the decisive factor in election is what God freely chooses. Note, this view is held by most Reformed Churches, the Presbyterians, the United Church of Christ, and the Anglicans. Grudem defines Election as "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". When comparing the Calvinistic view with the Arminian view, Piper says the following, "Calvinism says God's grace doesn't just bring us up to a point of "partial regeneration" Calvinism says God's grace doesn't stop and leave the outcome to our *ultimate self-*

determination — now, that's my term, ultimate self-determination. Olson doesn't use that. I think it's fair, and I think it's right in trying to get across the fact that man, not God, does the final and the ultimately decisive act. I know that the word *decisive* is a little slippery, and I'm trying to be clear and fair: *ultimately* decisive. According to Arminianism, the very final act that brings me into Christ, that decisive moment in conversion, is one that I perform, not God. Calvinism says that God does *more* in our conversion; namely, he overcomes all of our resistance and opens the eyes of our hearts to make Christ so real and so beautiful and so compelling that our will gladly embraces Christ as our Savior and Lord and Treasure."

2. The Conditional view. This view was promoted by Arminius and defined foreknowledge as foreseeing. In other words, God looked into the future and foresaw specific individuals who would choose Him. God then chose (or elected) to save those individuals. This view is called conditional because salvation depends upon the free choice of each human being. In other words, God chose to save certain individuals because he foresaw that they would choose him. In the conditional view, the decisive factor of election is the free choice of the individual. As Piper again quotes, "According to Arminianism, the very final act that brings me into Christ, that decisive moment in conversion, is one that I perform, not God."

Wesley was an adherent to Arminianism, hence Methodists, most Baptists, Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, and Calvary Chapel Churches hold to this view. Henry Clarence Thiessen defines election as "a sovereign act of God's grace whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation all those who He foreknew would accept Him. This is redemption in its elective aspect. In its simplest meaning, election refers to the intention, process and result of making a choice. It refers to an act of the will but more specifically in the Scriptures to an act of the divine will. Though election and predestination go hand in hand, the following distinction should be noted. Election means that God has chosen to save those He foreknew would accept His Son. Predestination means that God has fixed the destiny beforehand of those who are and who are not of His election. Thus, predestination can be viewed as bringing to pass of God's election. While election looks back to foreknowledge, predestination looks forward to destiny. Yet both are based on God's foreknowledge and neither violates man's free-will choice."

3. Another way to view the difference between the two position is to ask this question, did God choose sinners to be saved and then provide for their salvation? Or did God provide the way of salvation and let sinners choose for themselves? (from MacArthur)

c. Scriptural Examples of God's Sovereign Choice

1. God chose Abraham, Gen 18:19, *Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.*^[c] ¹⁹ *For I have chosen him* (see also Gen 12:1, Neh 9:7).
2. He chose Isaac Gen 17:19, *Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac."*^[d] *I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.*

3. He chose Jacob Gen 25:23, *The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* (also see Mal 1:2-3).
 4. He chose Saul 1 Sam 9:15, *About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me.*
 5. He chose David 1 Sam 16:1, *The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.*
 6. He chose His son the LJC, Is 42:1, *Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight.*
 7. Christ chose the twelve Jn 6:70, *Then Jesus replied, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Jn 15:16, You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.*
 8. God chose us, Jn 1:12-13, *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*
Jn 6:37-39, *All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me but raise them up at the last day.*
Jn 6:44, *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.*
Acts 13:48, *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*
Eph 1:4, *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*
2 Thess 2:13, *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits^[b] to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*
1 P 1:2, *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.*
- d. Scriptural Examples of Human Free Will
1. Mt 22:2-3, *The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.*
 2. Mt 23:36-40, *Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

- ³⁷ Jesus replied: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[c] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[d] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*
3. Lk 7:29-30, *All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus’ words, acknowledged that God’s way was right, because they had been baptized by John. ³⁰ But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.*
 4. Jn 3:16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
 5. Jn 5:39-40, *You study^[c] the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*
 6. Jn 6:35-36, *Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.*
 7. Jn 6:40, *For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.*
 8. Rm 10:9-10, *if you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.*
 9. Tit 2:11, *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.*
 10. 2 P 3:9, *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*
- e. Who is right and how do we resolve the issue? I will make two observations.
1. It is true God chose you to be a part of His Covenant Blessing before time began. You had nothing to do with it. Your spiritual life is entirely a gift from God. Prior to salvation, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, God planted a spiritual spark into your dead heart and kindled a desire to inquire about spiritual matters. He led you to hear the gospel message and gave you the faith to believe and now sustains that faith as you move through life and will take you to be with him in the future. It was, and is, and will be, all His doing.
- We could then ask the question, if election is all based on God’s choice, how is this fair? How is it that God chose to save some and not others, and condemns them to a life apart from him? The answer is noted in Rm 9:20, *But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’* Paul’s answer may seem cold and inadequate, but we must let God be God. Here is another thing to keep in mind as we wrestle with this answer. We must balance it with the other attributes of God: his Love, Mercy, Forbearance, Justice, and Righteousness. In other words, God does what is Right, Fair, and Just, and He does so with Love and Mercy. So, on the surface it may appear as if Election can be unfair, but the God who is absolute Justice, absolute Love, absolute Righteousness, and is forever Merciful and Kind, the God who

intends all to be saved, is the God who makes these decisions, and we must trust that they are Good.

2. It is also true that Election does not preclude human responsibility and free will. We are not spiritual robots. God extends his invitation of salvation through faith in Christ to all men and invites *whosoever* to believe. His preferred (or desired will) is that all come to him. God has no delight in those that are perishing. God has given Man a free will to either accept God's gracious message or reject it. Both truths, Divine choice (election) and man's free will to choose can be true at the same time. Here is another way to think about it. Who wrote the book of Romans? God or Paul? I would argue both did. Or who is living your Christian life today? Paul said *I am crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.* Paul is saying Christ is living my life, and he is also saying, I am living my life. Both are true. Here is a final example, look at Col 1:28-29, *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.* ²⁹ *To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.* By whose strength is Paul operating? Paul is operating under both God's power and his. Both are true. So, it is with Election. God's sovereign choice is true, yet it was made with the full understanding and integration of Man's free will.