

1 Peter 1 – Part C

Last week we introduced the six important terms that Peter mentioned in [1 Peter 1:2](#) - “**elect, foreknowledge, sanctification, obedience, sprinkling of the blood, and grace**”, and we began to look at the first term “**elect**” which embodies other biblical terms such as “**election, predestined, chosen,**” and “**called**”. The doctrine of “**election**” has always been a dividing line between Christians. If someone were to ask you the issues relative to “election”, this is how I would address the question.

1. The issue is the sovereignty of God. Is God sovereign over all things?
2. The critical doctrine in the debate is the doctrine of “total depravity”. I.e., does man have some kind of inherent goodness apart from God’s supernatural working in his life
3. What is at stake is the doctrine of eternal security. If salvation is dependent on man, then keeping their salvation becomes dependent on man.

As we ended, we chose to use the term “unconditional election” to define what we mean by the word “**elect**”. We saw that “unconditional election” may be defined as God’s sovereign choice made in eternity past regarding those whom He would save by faith through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. This choice was not based on anything that those chosen would do, or any choice that they would make, or on any aspect of their behavior. It was not based on anything true or good about them in contrast to other people, but God’s election was based solely on His own good pleasure and will. The doctrine of unconditional election specifically denies that God elects people based on His advanced knowledge (foreknowledge) in eternity past of the individual’s future decision of whether or not to receive Christ when they were presented with the opportunity to do so.

The entirely **opposite** doctrinal position to this is called “conditional election”, and it is an enormous doctrinal difference among Christians. Theologically, the difference has created what is known as “reformed theology” and “non-reformed theology”. “Conditional election” postulates that God cannot ensure that anyone will believe. God does all that He can do. His Spirit moves in people’s lives, He opens his Word to their heart, and the Holy Spirit draws and woos unbelievers as much as He possibly can, but in the final analysis, the choice is up to the individual, and so the doctrine is called “conditional election”. I.e., their election is “conditional” upon whatever decision that they make regarding Christ. It is dependent on the non-believer choosing God. So in the final analysis, God providing salvation to someone is dependent on their choosing Him and not God choosing them. What this position does not fully take into account is how to define the simple fact that all men in their sin are spiritually “dead”. [Ephesians 2:1](#) and [Ephesians 2:5](#) declare,

Eph 2:1 (NKJV) **And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,**

Eph 2:5 (NKJV) **even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

In both of these verses, it is the sinner who is spiritually dead and it is God who makes them alive. So, if you erringly miss this point and misdefine this aspect of a man’s condition, then you miss the truth of what actually happens. A dead man has no ability and no capacity to do anything – nothing. He is dead. It is at this very point spiritually that God has to intervene and give someone who is spiritually dead the

spiritual capacity to believe. That is called the “new birth”, “regeneration”, or being “born again”. It is when God gives a spiritually dead man the ability and the capacity to believe.

From God’s perspective in the doctrinal position of “conditional election”, there is no guarantee that anyone will be saved – no one. So, if you actually take the logic of that to its conclusion, it was possible for Christ to have totally died in vain. In that scenario, as far as God was concerned, it was possible for no one to be saved, and His Son could have died for nothing. So, what the doctrine of “conditional election” does is to assert human choice over divine choice where human choice becomes the deciding factor in salvation. In other terms, at the most crucial moment of salvation (the moment of believing or not believing), salvation is completely dependent on the individual and not on the Lord. Man is the determining and controlling factor in salvation, and at that point God simply becomes a spectator. We could say that God did His best, but it just was not enough to bring someone to Christ.

So, the question for us is not whether or not the concepts of “**election**” or “**predestination**” are taught in Scripture, but rather what do they mean. For instance, “**predestination**” has to do with the question of “**destiny**”. A destiny or a destination is a point toward which we are moving, but have not yet reached. When I book my airline tickets for Romania, I do not book them for nowhere. I have a specific destination in mind, a place that I am going, so when I book those tickets, I am “predestined” to go to Romania, but I am not there at the time that I purchase the ticket. When we add the prefix “pre” to “destination”, we are speaking of something that takes place prior to or before reaching the actual destination. So, the “pre” in “**predestination**” relates to the question of time. Theologically, predestination (because of the “pre”) clearly takes place, not only before we believe in Christ, but before time even began, before what Paul calls “**the foundation of the world**”. [Ephesians 1:4](#) says,

Eph 1:4 (NKJV) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

In this verse, the clear and undeniable agent of predestination is clearly God. “**He (God) chose us**” and He did it “**before the foundation of the world**”, or “**before time began**”. In His sovereignty, He predestined, He chose, He elected. It clearly says that “**He chose us...**” [Ephesians 1](#) gives the overwhelming reality of a sovereign God. It actually threatens our way of thinking and destroys any possibility of pride on our part for the fact that we have been saved. Apart from God’s choosing us, none of us would ever have come to Christ – not one single person. Over the years, when sharing the gospel with people, many have made a statement like this to me – “*I will come to God when I get good and ready.*” Trust me, but that will never happen.

The construction of the Greek verb for “**chose**” in [Ephesians 1:4](#) is that it is in the indicative mood, the aorist tense, and the middle voice. We know that the indicative mood is the mood of fact and that the aorist tense means that it was a once for all decision made in the past – in this case before the worlds were created, before time began. However, the important element for us is that the verb “**chose**” is in the middle voice. The middle voice means that the subject is acting for itself. The English language does not have a middle voice. The way that it is often described is that it is the voice of personal interest. It is the subject acting in its own interest, or in the case that God “**chose**”, He chose for Himself and by Himself. It is used of the act of choosing some person or thing for a definite object or calling. God, by an act of His grace, chose out from among mankind certain ones for Himself – and not one of those

whom He chose were worthy of His choice or contributed to their being called to Him in anyway at all. To the contrary, they did not even yet exist! Those He “**chose**” become His to be used for a certain purpose – **to the praise of the glory of His grace.** [Ephesians 1:5-6](#) says,

Eph 1:5 (NKJV) having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

So, the actual way that [Ephesians 1:4](#) could be translated is that “**God chose us for Himself**”. The words “**for Himself**” are not separate words in the Greek language, but are all a part of the middle voice of the verb. So, if you are translating this verse from Greek into English (or any other language), the middle voice allows you to translate it as “**God chose us for Himself**”. This is great! God chose you for Himself. Contrary to what we often think, it was not that we chose God, but that God chose us. I can assure you from Scripture that if God had never chosen you that you would never have chosen God. So when God chose you, He acted totally independent of any outside influence (before time began), and purely on the basis of His sovereignty. In election, however, it is still critical to understand that election does not exclude human responsibility. That is the one statement that divides. To the contrary, there is the necessity of those who are called to respond to the gospel by faith, but unless and until God intervenes on their behalf, they cannot respond or come. For the individual who does not accept the definition of “**election**”, in their mind they cannot understand or justify how two totally opposite ideas can co-exist at the same time. Once again, it is what was previously referred to as an “antinomy”, or two seemingly contrary ideas that in reality are not contrary to one another, but are fully compatible to one another. They may not be fully reconciled to us, but they are fully reconciled in both the mind and will of God. We call it a “paradox”.

In reality, this takes all of the pressure off of us. Our responsibility as believers is to simply share the gospel, and let God take it from there. [Romans 1:16](#) says,

Ro 1:16 (NKJV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

You never have to window-dress the gospel. You never have to embellish it or decorate it with your ideas. You simply have to communicate it and share it accurately. The power of God is not in how creative we can be with the gospel or how articulate we are with it, but the power to save people rests totally with God and not with us. I am so grateful that your salvation is not dependent on how effective, articulate, or persuasive that I am. It is not dependent on whether or not we have an invitation at the end of the service, or whether or not I preached some powerful evangelistic message. Listen carefully. Salvation is all of God. He may use me. He may use you. However, please understand that God’s ability to save and His choice of who to save has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with us, but is totally dependent on His sovereignty as the eternal God alone – AND NOTHING ELSE.

We must understand that our faith and salvation rest entirely on God’s election. Yet the day that we came to Christ, we did so because of a genuine internal desire to do so (the doctrine of irresistible grace, or the effectual call). When we came to Christ, we did not do so by force or against our will. To the contrary, we wanted to come, we desired to come because of God’s irresistible grace that He gave to us

through the sovereign work of His Holy Spirit. The following are four options that we can consider relative to a sovereign God and a fallen world:

1. God could have provided a plan in which no one would be saved.
2. God could have provided a plan in which everyone would be saved (Universalism).
3. God could have provided a plan in which only some would be saved based on their choosing God (non-reformed view).
4. God could have provided a plan in which only some would be saved based on God choosing them (reformed view).

Obviously, we can immediately rule out Item 1 and Item 2, even though Universalists would fully embrace Item 2. For them, their erroneous belief is based on their emotions, or the fact that they cannot accept the fact of an eternal judgment. So, that leaves us with two options – Option 3 and Option 4. If we choose Option 3 where man is the determining factor in salvation, then we have to completely misdefine and ignore the biblical terms of “**election, predestined, chosen,**” and “**called**”. Those terms are biblical terms and must be included in any doctrinal stance that we have.

So that leaves us with Option 4, and the issue is how does Option 4 actually work? Well, the correct answer is “**election**”. God intervenes directly and fully ensures the salvation of some, or those that He has specifically chosen and called. So, the real problem in the predestination / election debate revolves more around the issue of God saving some, but not all. Another way of saying it that may be more accurate is that God “ensures” the salvation of some, but passes over others. The reformed view is Option 4 which states that God intervenes in the lives of the elect, or predestined, and that He ensures that they will be saved. The non-reformed view is Item 3 in which man is the governing factor in the choosing.

The reformed view does not exclude the fact that the non-elect will be given “opportunities” to come to Christ, but assumes that without God’s divine intervention that they will never want to come to Christ. Just simply left to themselves, to their sinful nature, and to the spiritual fact that they are dead in their sins and trespasses, they will not choose Christ in and of themselves. It is this point that is precisely the area of dispute. The non-reformed position states that every fallen person has the “spiritual capacity” to choose Christ. It is something that God has innately provided for them. It would be argued that God has made them in His image, and because of that, no man is so fallen that they cannot choose Christ on their own. I.e., God can be involved if He chooses to be, but in the final analysis, man casts the deciding ballot relative to their eternal destiny. The non-reformed view states that God provides the opportunities for all to be saved, but that man has the final say. Notwithstanding, if you take that position, then you **MUST** give the words **predestination** and **election** a non-biblical meaning.

The difficult and emotional issue is the relationship between Options 3 and 4, or **why does God only choose some and not all?** Why does He show mercy to some, show grace to some, but not mercy and grace to all? The **only** answer to that question is simple – **nobody knows**. No one has any idea as to why God sovereignly chooses to save some, but not all. Someone will immediately say, “Well, what about a verse like **2 Peter 3:9?**”

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

In order to properly understand that verse, you must clearly define the word “**us**”. Who is Peter speaking to? If you do not **contextually** define the word “**us**”, then you cannot properly interpret the verse, and contextually the word “**us**” is specifically referring to believers, or those whom God has chosen.

We do not doubt for one second that if God had chosen to that He could have saved everyone. HE HAS THE POWER TO SAVE ALL, but He has not chosen to do that, and neither me, nor you, nor anyone else knows why. However, the one thing that we do know is that if God pleases to save some and not all, then there is nothing, absolutely nothing wrong with that decision. A sovereign and holy God can make that decision and it be perfectly righteous. GOD IS UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO SAVE ANYONE. So, if He chooses to save some, that in no way obligates Him to save all. The Scriptures insist in [Romans 9](#) and elsewhere that it is God’s prerogative, and His prerogative alone, to have mercy on whomever He chooses to have mercy. At this point, the non-reformed theologian cries out, “That is not fair!” They would even go so far as to say, “That is not just!” At that point in the debate, I would be incredibly nervous to accuse God of not being just. That is the creature telling the Creator that He does not know what He is doing.

As a Christian, if God chooses to give His mercy and grace to some, but not to all, then I simply need to submit to his holy and righteous decision – whether I understand it or not. I must learn to live with the “**mysteries**” of His will. If I do not, then I will always be contending with Him. There is absolutely nothing in Scripture that obligates God to be merciful to anyone. So, if God shows mercy to some in their sin and exercises justice toward others because of their sin, then I must learn to praise Him in both His mercy and in His justice. When He executes His justice toward the sinner, He has done nothing wrong. He is simply executing His justice according to His righteousness.