

1 Peter 1 – Part E

We are continuing with our study of [1 Peter 1:2](#), and specifically the issue of election and predestination. We might call these terms “theological twins”. The theological debates over these biblical terms have divided many Christians into different camps throughout all of Christianity. They are not easy terms to explain or even to fully grasp. Previously, we talked about the two theological terms that actually describe the language that the two major theological camps use to express their position. The reformed position is called “unconditional election” and means that God’s choosing specific individuals was not conditioned on anything that that individual would ever do, but was based solely on God’s good pleasure and sovereign choice of that individual. The non-reformed position is the exact opposite and is called “conditional election”. It means that God’s choosing specific individuals was conditioned on His knowing the specific decision that someone would make regarding Christ and that person’s choice became the basis of His choosing them.

Now, it is important to see the context in which the Bible actually sets forth the doctrine of election, and specifically unconditional election. Because of Adam’s transgression, absolutely all of his descendants enter into the world as lost, guilty sinners. Everyone enters the world already corrupted by Adam’s sinful nature, and because of that specific sin nature indwelling everyone born into the world, no one has any innate desire for fellowship with God. God’s nature is divine and is called holy, just, and good. Our inborn nature is sinful, perverse, and corrupt. It would have been perfectly just for God to have left all men in their sin and in their misery and to have shown mercy to none. Please appreciate that God is under no obligation whatsoever to provide salvation for anyone. There was a time in biblical history, the time of the universal flood, when God chose to destroy the entire population of the earth, with the exception of only eight persons. He showed mercy to eight people, and eight people only – and He was completely just in what He did. We have no claims on how God administers either His justice or His mercy. It is His sovereign and solemn choice.

So, the doctrine of election declares that God, “**before the foundation of the world**” ([Ephesians 1:4](#)), before time began, in His total, absolute sovereignty chose certain individuals to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these alone, He purposed to save. God could have chosen to save all men. He has all authority and all power to do so if that was what pleased Him. Likewise, God could have chosen to save no one, for He was not under any obligation to show mercy to anyone. However, what God chose to do was to save some, but not all, and that is exactly what creates the tension in people. It was God’s choice, and it is called “**election**” and “**predestination**”. It must be understood that God’s choice of saving particular individuals, known as the doctrine of limited atonement, i.e., God’s choice is exclusively limited to the specific individuals that He has sovereignly chosen, and was NOT based on any foreseen act, condition, or response of those whom He chose. It was based solely, exclusively, utterly, completely, fully, and absolutely on God’s sovereign good pleasure and His sovereign will.

Once again, and we can never get away from this, if we could condense the entire issue down to one phrase, the issue would be “the sovereignty of God”. It is an issue of the sovereignty of God. Is God sovereign in salvation, or is He somehow dependent on man’s involvement and man’s participation in some way? Put another way, is God’s choice contingent on man’s choice such that without man’s cooperation, God’s choice is helpless and powerless? The substance of this doctrine rests solely on the

sovereignty of God’s mercy and God’s grace. By definition, grace is not something that God is obligated to give. It is His divine prerogative to grant it or to withhold it. God does not owe grace or mercy to anyone. So, the ground on which God chooses the objects of His mercy is solely the “**good pleasure of His will**”. [Ephesians 1:3-5](#) states it this way,

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

So, from a theological perspective, election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do, but was the result of God’s self-determined purpose completely independent of the individual chosen. This is the doctrine of unconditional election. God’s “selection” and “choosing” of particular individuals for salvation was before the “**foundation of the world**” and was not based on any foreseen response or act performed by the individual chosen. It was not based on any foreseen merit, or any foreseen good works performed by them, or by any foreseen faith. Faith and good works are the result and not the cause of God’s choice. [2 Thessalonians 2:13-14](#) says,

¹³But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 Timothy 1:9](#) says,

⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

[John 15:16](#) says,

¹⁶You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Under the doctrine of either “conditional election” or “unconditional election”, the question is whether or not my individual life has any bearing on God’s decision to choose me, to elect me, or to foreordain me into His kingdom. I say this graciously, but you had better hope that it does not. This is a very difficult issue that has to be treated with great care. Even though God made His choice before we were ever born, He still knew everything about us and everything about our lives before we time even began. This is the doctrine of the **omniscience** of God. It is this foreknowledge, this omniscience that makes Him God, and He would not be God without it. The question, however, is whether or not He actually took His prior knowledge about our lives into account when He made His decision regarding election. How we answer that question reveals whether or not we are reformed or non-reformed in our theology. Now, that may not mean much to you as a Christian, but it can have very disastrous spiritual results. For instance, the Pentecostal denomination’s position is that salvation is not a sovereign work of God, but one that is dependent on the individual. It is almost as if God has a secondary role in salvation and not

the primary role. Because they believe that salvation is initially dependent on the individual, they also believe that maintaining their salvation is dependent on them as well. Therefore, they believe that you can lose your salvation. You sin against God and so you have to be saved again. Think of it this way. Their theology has to logically lead them to the position where they would say that we probably are not saved because we sinned against God at some time, but never sought to be saved again. So, the issue is this: On what does God base His decision to elect some and not others? Is it God's sovereign choice or did He see something in us that merited His favor? That is the question.

The non-reformed churches, which is the majority of denominations to include most Southern Baptist churches, teach that election is "conditional". I.e., God elects certain people to salvation, but He does so because "they" have met certain conditions and certain requirements that make them "selectable". This is how it works theologically / doctrinally. Conditional election is based on God's foreknowledge of how we will "ultimately" and "eventually" respond to the gospel. The idea is that from all eternity, God looks down the tunnel of time and sees in advance all those who will eventually respond to the gospel and who will not. He knows in advance who will exercise faith and who will not exercise faith. So, on the basis of His prior knowledge of what choice the individual will make, God chooses them into His kingdom. He elects them because He knows that they will eventually believe when given the opportunity. However, the believing was totally based on the individual's choice and was not dependent on God. It was an independent choice apart from God. In this position, the individual does not need God to make the right decision. All they need in this scenario are the facts. They assess the information and then decide for themselves as to what they want to do,

Reformed theology, however, does not hold that position. Reformed theology states that God predestines some people to receive a divine call into His kingdom that others will not receive. Only the predestined, only the called, only the elect receive this call, and only those who receive this call are justified. So, in the reformed position there is a definitive process of "selection" involved, but it is God's selection. The tension immediately develops when you realize that not everyone is predestined to receive this call, and therefore will not be saved. Only those who have been predestined will believe, and only those who believe will be justified and adopted into God's kingdom.

- The non-reformed view states that we are elected because we believed. The reformed views states that we believe because we were elected.
- The non-reformed view depends on the sinner, the reformed view depends on God.
- The non-reformed view sees God's election as the result of the sinner's faith. The reformed view sees the sinner's faith as the result of God's election.

The views are totally opposite. One is man-centered, the other is God-centered. One depends on man, the other depends on God. I want to say in no uncertain terms that we had better be careful in ever thinking that there is some good in us that merits God's favor on our life. That is very dangerous theology and will lead to a man-centered theology and a man-centered lifestyle – which is exactly what we have in America today.

The non-reformed doctrine of "conditional election" says that Christ died to make salvation **possible**, but not necessarily **actual**. I.e., there is the possibility that you can be saved, but it is up to you to decide.

So, Jesus' death makes salvation possible, but the sinner makes the choice. The final decision is always the sinner's decision.

Now, here is the problem. According to Scripture, sinners are spiritually dead, "**dead in trespasses and sin**", separated from the life of God. They are blind, and exist in a state of spiritual death, in a state of perishing. The "**god of this world**" has "**blinded**" them as well. In their natural state, they cannot understand the things of God, for they are "**foolishness**" to them. [Romans 3:10-18](#) clearly states that there is "**none who seeks God**" and that there is "**no fear of God before their eyes**". In essence, it is impossible for the spiritually dead, double blind sinner cut off from the life of God with no desire for God and no ability to seek after God and no fear of God before his eyes to all of a sudden just pull himself up by his bootstraps and take hold of a "potential" salvation that is kind of hanging out there for him if he chooses it. From God's perspective, the spiritually dead sinner, on his own, cannot do anything to initiate spiritual life. The whole debate on predestination and election rests squarely at this point: "Does a fallen and sinful man, spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins, in and of himself have the natural desire and innate spiritual power to both desire and choose Christ?" No matter which side of the debate that you take, you **MUST** be able to scripturally answer that question. To simplify the question even more, "Does fallen and sinful man have the desire within himself, or must he receive that desire from God?" The position that you take at this point becomes the issue of "free will" versus "depraved will".