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SESSION 3: Unconditional Election¹

I. PRELIMINARIES

A. Election is a difficult doctrine

“Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. No restraints can hold it back from wandering in forbidden bypaths and thrusting upward to the heights... He has set forth by his Word the secrets of his will that he has decided to reveal to us. These he decided to reveal in so far as he foresaw that they would concern and benefit us... Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste, or to see in darkness... The best limit of sobriety for us will be not only to follow God’s lead always in learning but, when he sets an end to teaching, to stop trying to be wise.”²

ARTICLE 14: Just as, by God’s wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election has been proclaimed through the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles... so also today in God’s church, for which it was specifically intended, this teaching must be set forth—with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High. This must be done for the glory of God’s most holy name, and for the lively comfort of his people.³

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.”
(Deuteronomy 29:29, ESV).

B. Election is a comforting doctrine

“Why precisely this or that one is placed in circumstances which lead to saving faith, while others are not so placed, is indeed, a mystery. We cannot explain the workings of Providence; but we know that the Judge of the earth shall do right, and that when we attain to perfect knowledge we shall see that He has sufficient reasons for all His acts.”⁴

¹ This outline is adapted from portions of chapter 4 of *The Doctrines of Grace*, by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken. For further study, see Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chapter 32; *Chosen for Life* by Sam Storms; and *Sovereign Grace and the Glorious Mystery of Election*, by C.J. Mahaney (<http://bit.ly/2oNMHGI>).

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (McNeill/Battles), III.xxi.1–3.

³ Canons of Dort, I.14; in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 125.

⁴ Loraine Boettner, quoted in Boice and Ryken, 95.

“The doctrine of election, like every truth about God, involves mystery and sometimes stirs controversy. But in Scripture it is a pastoral doctrine, brought in to help Christians see how great is the grace that saves them, and to move them to humility, confidence, joy, praise, faithfulness, and holiness in response. It is the family secret of the children of God.”⁵

C. Election is a biblical doctrine

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will,” (Ephesians 1:3–5).

II. DEFINING ELECTION

“Divine election may be defined as that loving and merciful decision by God to bestow eternal life upon some, but not all, hell-deserving sinners.”⁶

“Election is 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.”⁷

“Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, God chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. God did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.

And so God decreed to give to Christ those chosen for salvation, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ’s fellowship through the Word and Spirit. In other words, God decreed to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of the Son, to glorify them.

God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of God’s glorious grace.”⁸

Romans 9

A. Romans 9:1-5 Paul’s compassion on Jews.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology*, 149–50

⁶ Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 45.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 670.

⁸ Canons of Dort, I.7; in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 124.

B. Romans 9:6-13. God chooses.

“We do not ‘predicate of this divine hate those unworthy features which belong to hate as it is exercised by us sinful men. In God’s hate there is no malice, malignancy, vindictiveness, unholy rancour or bitterness. The kind of hate thus characterized is condemned in Scripture and it would be blasphemy to predicate the same on God.’ There is, therefore, in God a *holy hatred* that is the antithesis of his *saving love*.”⁹

C. Romans 9:14-18 God’s choice is not unjust

“The principle, again, is this: *When God determines who shall and who shall not enjoy his blessings, be they earthly or heavenly, he does so according to his sovereign good pleasure and not according to anything in humanity.*”¹⁰

D. Romans 9:19–29 Reveals God’s purpose

III. THREE GENERATIONS OF ELECTION

A. Abraham: Genesis 12:1–3; cf. Josh 24:2

B. Isaac: Genesis 17:15–21, 21:12; cf. Rom. 9:7; Heb. 11:18

C. Jacob: Genesis 25:19–26; cf. Mal. 1:1-5; Rom. 9:10-13

IV. OTHER SCRIPTURAL BASIS

A. Deuteronomy 7:7–8

“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:7–8, ESV)

B. John 15:16

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” (John 15:16, ESV)

⁹ Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 119.

¹⁰ Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 121.

C. Acts 13:48

“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48, ESV)

D. Romans 11:5–6

“So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” (Romans 11:5–6, ESV)

E. Romans 11:7

“What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,” (Romans 11:7, ESV)

F. Ephesians 1:3–6

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:3–6, ESV)

G. 1 Thessalonians 5:9

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Thessalonians 5:9, ESV)

H. 2 Thessalonians 2:13

“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” (2 Thessalonians 2:13, ESV)

V. IS GOD JUST?

Essential elements of the answer:¹¹

- A. All human beings deserve hell, not heaven.
- B. If any individual is to be saved, it must be by mercy only, and mercy falls in an entirely different category from justice.

¹¹ Boice and Ryken, p. 107.

- C. Even if God should save people on the basis of something in them—faith, good works, or something else—this actually would be an injustice, since individuals and their backgrounds are unequal.

VI. TWO IRREPRESSIBLE OBJECTIONS

- A. Shouldn't God show mercy to everyone?
- B. Why doesn't God show mercy to everyone?

VII. REFORMED THEOLOGY FOR REAL LIFE

- A. Humility before God¹²

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7, ESV)

“They who avow the doctrines distinguished by the name of Calvinism, ought, if consistent with their own principles, to be the most gentle and forbearing of all men, in *meekness* instructing them that oppose. With us, it is a fundamental maxim, that a man can receive nothing but what is given him from heaven (John 3:27). If, therefore, it has pleased God to give us the knowledge of some truths, which are hidden from others, who have the same outward means of information; it is a just reason for thankfulness to him, but will not justify our being angry with them; for we are no better or wiser than they in ourselves, and might have opposed the truths which we now prize, with the same eagerness and obstinacy, if his grace had not made us to differ. If the man, mentioned in John 9, who was born blind, on whom our Lord graciously bestowed the blessing of sight, had taken a cudgel and beat all the blind men he met, because they would not see, his conduct would have greatly resembled that of an angry Calvinist.”¹³

- B. Assurance from God

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

- C. Gratefulness to God

¹² C.J. Mahaney, *Sovereign Grace and the Glorious Mystery of Election*, 10ff.

¹³ John Newton, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late Rev. William Grimshaw* (London: 1799), pages 86–87.

<http://bit.ly/ig6xNW>

“If the *immediate* goal of election is the salvation of sinners, the *ultimate* goal of election is *worship!*”¹⁴

“To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ... Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1, 23-25, ESV)

D. Mission for the Glory of God

“And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” (Acts 18:9–11, ESV)

“I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen him; and I am sure he chose me before I was born, or else he never would have chosen me afterwards; and he must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why he should have looked upon me with special love.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 41.

¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon, quoted by C.J. Mahaney, *Sovereign Grace and the Glorious Mystery of Election*, 7.
