

We want to return this morning to our short series on the Doctrines of Grace. Having already seen the T (Total Depravity), we come this week the U (Unconditional Election). And I want to consider it in three sermons under these three headings: Defined, Defended, and Applied.

This morning, I want to simply define it from the Scriptures, next week defend it from the sceptics, and then in two weeks apply it to our hearts and lives. Election Defined (this morning), Defended (next week), and Applied (in two weeks).

Thus, in Defining election, I want to examine four descriptions of it: it's eternal, it's personal, it's covenantal, and it's unconditional (and because most of these are found in 2Thess.2:13, we will use it as our primary text).

By unconditional election is meant, God's gracious choice of individuals, from eternity, for salvation, based solely upon His covenant love. Or put another way, election is eternal, personal, covenantal, and unconditional.

But before I come to these, let me briefly point out the connection between unconditional election and total depravity. If you remember, because of man's fall in Adam, he has lost all ability, in and of himself, to choose God. Native man, left to himself, will always and only choose sin and the world. And so, because man will not (and cannot) choose God, it becomes a necessary and blessed truth, that God has, from eternity, chose a people for Himself.

Put another way, the reason why some people will choose God is because God has, from eternity, chosen them. Our choice of God is the necessary consequence to His choice of us. He chose us from eternity, so that we would choose Him in time.

- I. It's Eternal
- II. It's Personal
- III. It's Covenantal
- IV. It's Unconditional

#### I. It's Eternal

1. V13—"But 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."
2. The phrase "from the beginning" means "from eternal past" or "from the beginning of God's eternal decree."
3. The phrase doesn't refer to the beginning of creation, but to a "time" that predated creation—a "time" before creation.
4. Prov.8:23—"I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth."
5. These are the words of the Wisdom of God and refer to the eternal relationship He had with the Father.
6. The Wisdom (or Word of God) was established from everlasting, from the beginning, as the Savior of sinners.
7. Notice how the two phrases "from everlasting" and "from the beginning" are one and the same thing.
8. Thus, when Paul says that God chose them "from the beginning" he means, He chose them from everlasting.

9. Eph.1:4—"Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"—"from everlasting" or "from the beginning."
10. Now, before we move on to our second heading, I want to address an issue that may be difficult to understand.
11. How can God elect a people who have no actual existence until after creation and their individual birth?
12. How did God choose a people from eternity, if that people had no actual existence until after creation?
13. Well, allow for me to answer this question by suggesting two facts—God alone is eternal and God knew His works from eternity.
14. (1) God alone is eternal—we recently learned in our study of Genesis, before creation, only God existed.
15. Before Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and earth," only God had actual existence.
16. Put another way, everything that existed prior to creation was God, the reason being, only God is eternal.
17. Thus, we have to be very clear at this point—no created thing had an actual existence prior to creation.
18. All that existed prior to Genesis 1:1 is God, and the reason is very simple—only God Himself is eternal.
19. Put another way—no created thing (man included) is eternal—all created things have their actual being in time.
20. (2) God knew His works from eternity—while the things willed had no actual being, they existed as a divine idea.
21. Acts 15:18—"Known to God from eternity are all His works"—that is, His works of creation and redemption.
22. God knows every work of His that will come to pass, and He knows them "from eternity"—from everlasting.
23. Thus, God does not create in order to know His creation, He creates (in time) because He knows His creation.
24. Thus, we must distinguish between our actual being (in time) and our purposed being (from eternity).
25. But here's the difficulty—for God to purpose to create means, what God purposed to create, exists to God.
26. God doesn't have to wait until He creates to know His creation—He knew what He would create from eternity.
27. Herman Bavinck—"God is the creator of all things: all things have been thought before they were called into being. As a result, all things are eternally present in His mind."
28. Stephan Charnock—"Creatures must be known by God before they were made, and not known because they were made: He knew them to make them, and did not make them to know them."
29. For example, God willed to create and redeem me from eternity, and yet, I had no actual existence until January 15, 1967.
30. I came into existence in 1967 and I was redeemed in 1994, and yet, I was known to God from eternity.
31. God did not create me in order to know me, but He created me in time, because He knew me from eternity.
32. Though I had no actual existence from eternity, I was known by God from eternity, because God knows all things simultaneously, perfectly, and eternally.

33. For us to know something it has to actually exist—our knowledge is dependent upon observation and information.
34. But this isn't like God—God's knowledge is eternal and perfect and includes all that will be and can be.
35. God isn't informed about anything—He's uniformed because He already knows all things and that from eternity.
36. God doesn't wait until something actually exists to know it, He knows all things equally before and after they exists.
37. Jer.1:5—"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" Jer.31:3—"I have loved you with an everlasting love."
38. These texts refer to God's love for His people prior to the actual existence—He knows (loves) them from eternity.

## II. It's Personal

1. Here I simply want to underscore, that election concerns individual people and does not include all people.
2. There are those who've suggested that God elected the entire human race, and thus all people are elect.
3. They deny that election is personal and suggest that election is universal (that God chose the human race).
4. They suggest that God chose the entire human race, and thus, those who believe are rightly called elect.
5. But this runs contrary to the word elect—to elect is to select, which means a selection from a larger number.
6. V13—"God from the beginning chose you for salvation"—chose who? He chose individual Christians.
7. The word rendered "chose" literally means "to choose, to select, or to take out from a larger number."
8. Brethren, by very definition, to choose some means you do not choose others—it means to take from.
9. Thus, the question becomes—who or what is the mass from which God chose specific people for salvation.
10. Well, while I want to return to this topic next week, let me simply say—God chose a people from fallen humanity.
11. Rom.9:21—"Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"
12. By "lump" is meant fallen humanity, and I say that because only fallen creatures can be objects of mercy and wrath.
13. Thus, God does elect all men for salvation, but only some men for salvation—the rest He chose to leave in their sin (a subject we will discuss next week).
14. Matt.20:16—"Many are called but few chosen"—that is, while all men are called to believe, only a few will (and the reason being, they were chosen for salvation).
15. Rom.11:17—"the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded"—there are two groups "the elect" and "the rest."
16. The elect Jews obtained salvation and the rest did not—why? Because they were ordained for salvation.
17. Thus, Scripture distinguishes between the elect and non-elect, and each of these are comprised of individuals.

18. Now, before I leave this second heading, let me say a few words about the number of those elected by God.
19. The question has often been debated—Which group of individuals is larger? The elect or the non-elect?
20. Well, in the first place let me say, the Scriptures nowhere expressly tell us which of these groups are larger.
21. And thus, I think it's best to largely leave this question unanswered—if God hasn't directly answered it then I don't feel any obligation to attempt to answer it.
22. But, as we consider the overall witness of Holy Scripture, I suggest that two things become rather clear.
23. (1) In comparison to most generations, the people of God (or the elect of God), form a rather small remnant.
24. (2) In regards to their collective whole, the elect form a large multitude that no man can number, taken from every tribe and tongue.
25. Rev.7:9—"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands."
26. Now let just say in passing, that Charles Spurgeon believed there will more saved than lost in the last day.
27. And the reason he believed this was because he believed that all children who die in infancy go to heaven (and thus, means they were elect).
28. CHS—" I believe there will be more in heaven than in hell...because Christ, in everything, is to "have the pre-eminence" and I cannot conceive how he could have the pre-eminence if there are to be more in the dominions of Satan than in paradise. Moreover, it is said there is to be a multitude that no man can number in heaven; I have never read that there is to be a multitude that no man can number in hell.
29. But Spurgeon wasn't the only person who thought this, many others, such as B.B. Warfield thought the same thing.
30. B.B. Warfield—"The number of the saved shall in the end be not small but large, and not merely absolutely but comparatively large...to speak plainly, it shall embrace the immensely greater part of the human race."

### III. It's Covenantal

1. By this I mean, election takes place within the context of an eternal covenant called the covenant of redemption.
2. This aspect of election isn't found directly in 2Thess.2:13, but is taught in several other texts (two of which I want to briefly consider).
3. Jn.6:39—"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day."
4. Notice our Savior speaks of a people given to Him by His Father, for which He's responsible to save.
5. This reminds me of something I said last Wednesday, as we've been expounded the first 11 chapters of Genesis.
6. If you remember I said, while each person of the Trinity works equally, they also each work uniquely.
7. And so, with regards to election—though it's a work of the entire Trinity, it's here attributed to the Father.

8. The Father chose a people to give to His Son as a Bride—the Son agreed to come in time as her Surety.
9. Eph.1:4—"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him."
10. "He chose us in Him"—that is, the Father chose us in Christ as our covenant Head—these means we were chosen to be saved by Christ.
11. Christ Himself is referred to as "elect" (1Pet.2:6) and "foreordained" (1Pet.1:20) to be our covenant Head.
12. Thus, within that eternal covenant of redemption, the Father chose His Son as the Mediator between God and Man.
13. And then He chose a people in Christ, to be saved for the sake of Christ, and as a reward for Christ's work.
14. It's for this reason grace is given in Christ "before time began" (2Tim.1:9); we were elected in Christ to receive grace from Christ.
15. Thus, it's impossible to rightly understand election without understanding its covenantal framework.

#### IV. It's Unconditional

1. By this I mean, God did not choose a people based upon anything they would do including believing.
2. This of course is in many ways the heart of the debate—historical Arminianism explicitly rejects this.
3. The Opinions of the Remonstrants (1618)—"The election of particular persons is decisive, out of consideration of faith in Jesus Christ and of perseverance; not, however, apart from a consideration of faith and perseverance in the true faith, as a condition necessary for electing."
4. In other reason, individual people are elected based upon the condition of faith in Christ and perseverance.
5. According to historical Arminianism, election is conditioned upon God knowing who will believe and persevere.
6. They suggest that God looks into the future and sees who will, of their own freewill believe and endure.
7. Those who will believe and endure are thus elected, based upon the fact that they will believe and endure.
8. But this is the very opposite of what our text teaches—notice we are elected so that we will be saved.
9. V13—"God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
10. God chose a people, from eternity past, for a specific reason—He chose them to believe and not because they would believe.
11. In other words, faith in Christ is not the condition of our election, but it's the consequence of our election.
12. Paul describes three aspects of our salvation, to which the elect have been elected—sanctification by the Spirit, faith in Christ, and the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
13. (1) Sanctification by the Spirit—the word sanctification literally means "to set apart"—it here refers to regeneration.
14. (2) Belief in the truth—this refers to faith in Christ as revealed to us within the pages of Holy Scripture.

15. (3) Obtaining the glory of Christ, v14—"to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
16. "The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" refers to our glorification—the formal completion of our salvation.
17. Thus, if election is not conditioned upon our faith or endurance, what is our election conditioned on?
18. Perhaps I can put the question even more plainly—Why did God choose some people and not others?
19. Well, before I attempt to answer this question, let me first clarify, God's election of a people was not based on their merit.
20. God did not choose a people based on anything in them—there was no cause for election in the elect themselves.
21. God did not perceive they would be smarter, more sensitive, more loving, more useful, or more worthy.
22. No! The elect, as viewed within that single plump of fallen humanity, were just as depraved as the rest.
23. But the only reason given for God's choice was His sovereign love—He loved some in a way He did not love others.
24. It's for this reason, in almost every text that speaks about election, we have mention of the love of God!
25. V13—"But 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."
26. Eph. 1:4-5—"In love having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace."
27. Deut. 7:7-8—"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you."
28. While the election of Israel was national and not saving, it typified God's loving election of His people.
29. Clarification 1—Election is one aspect of God's eternal decree—God's decree is larger than election.
30. Understood in the widest sense, God's decree includes every event that comes to pass—big, small, good, and bad.
31. God didn't merely elect some for salvation, but He foreordained all things that come to pass without exception.
32. This is really a proof for election—if God has foreordained all things, then this obviously includes salvation (thus, who, how, and when are all ordained or decreed by God from eternity).
33. Clarification 2—Election is unto salvation and is not salvation—remember, God chose a people for salvation.
34. This means the elect are born in need of salvation just as the non-elect—they are born equally depraved.
35. Clarification 3—Election is a humbling and encouraging truth—this is something I want to return to in two weeks (election applied).
36. But let me simply say here in closing—the doctrine of election is largely found in the letters of the NT.
37. It's for this reason, nothing should humble us more and encourage us more, than God's electing grace.
38. And so, election is eternal, personal, covenantal, and unconditional—God-willing we will return next week to answer some objections.