

# *Election and Predestination?*



*Dr. Steve Combs*

**Election  
and  
Predestination?**

**Eph. 1:4-5**

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# Election And Predestination

## Ephesians 1:4-6

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**4** According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

**5** Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

**6** To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. (Eph. 1:4-6)

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**M**any commentators equate these verses with the teaching of John Calvin (1509-1564) on *unconditional election*. Consequently, they take very little time to study them closely or to explain them.

### Introduction

Unconditional election is one of the cardinal doctrines of what today is called Calvinism, Sovereign Grace, or The Doctrines of Grace. A simple statement of the doctrine of unconditional election and its accompanying doctrine of reprobation is this:

*It may be defined as that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation ... Reprobation may be defined as that eternal decree of God whereby He has determined to pass some men by with the operations of His special grace, and to punish them for their sins, to the manifestation of His justice.* <sup>1</sup>

Other related doctrines of Calvinism are Total Inability (people are completely depraved and unable to choose God, choose salvation, or respond to the gospel), Limited Atonement (Christ died

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only for the unconditionally elected), Irresistible Grace (some call it the “effectual call” - when God calls you to Himself you cannot successfully resist), and Perseverance of the Saints (the elect cannot so fall from the faith as to be eternally condemned). Unconditional election is the teaching that before the foundation of the earth, in eternity past, God chose certain people to be saved and left the rest to remain unsaved. The motive for this choice was entirely in the good pleasure of God’s will and not because of some merit, choice, or faith He foresaw in those chosen.

Calvinists usually assume that God’s choice (or “election” as it is translated elsewhere) in Ephesians 1:4 is a choice to salvation. Their primary application of the word *election* is to salvation.

They sometimes refer to this as *predestination*. God, they would say, chose some to be saved and predestinated them to salvation. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith puts it this way in chapter three, paragraph three:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ ... to the praise of His glorious grace ... others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of His glorious justice.<sup>2</sup>

Since the teaching of unconditional election is that before the foundation of the world and according to the good pleasure of His will, God chose only a few (not all) to be saved, it automatically leaves the rest (the majority) to remain unsaved and go to hell. They call this “grace.” John Calvin said it plainly:

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.<sup>3</sup>

Many have departed from Calvin, saying that the Bible never says the non-elect are predestined to go to Hell, although they agree

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with him on unconditional election of the saved. I wholeheartedly agree that the Scriptures never declare that God has predestined anyone to Hell. However, if God has arbitrarily, before the foundation of the world, chosen some (and *only* some) to be saved and go to Heaven, then He has automatically left others to go to the only place they can, Hell. This, too, is clearly by His choice. All must go either to Heaven or Hell. There is no other alternative. If the door is shut to Heaven, the non-elect have only one other destiny left, to go to hell. According to predestination theologians, God alone made that decision. This is the simple reality of the doctrine of unconditional election.

## The Sovereignty of God

Another related matter is the doctrine of *the sovereignty of God*. This is a key doctrine (perhaps *the* key doctrine) in Calvinistic teaching. Erikson, in *Christian Theology*, explains this:

Calvinism's second major concept is the sovereignty of God. He is the creator and Lord of all things, and consequently he is free to do whatever he wills. He is not subject to or answerable to anyone. Humans are in no position to judge God for what he does ... This concept of the divine sovereignty, together with human inability, is basic to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. Without these two concepts the remainder of the doctrine makes little sense.<sup>4</sup>

The 1689 Baptist Confession, Chapter three, *God's Decree*, states the Reformed Doctrine relating to God's sovereignty.

God has decreed all things that occur, and this he has done in himself, from all eternity, by the perfectly wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably.

Yet he has done this in such a way that God is neither the author of sin, nor does he share with anyone in sinning, nor does this violate the will of the creature,

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nor is the free working or contingency of second causes taken away but rather established.

In all this, God's wisdom is displayed in directing all things, as is his power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree ...

Although God knows everything which may or can come to pass under all imaginable conditions, yet he has not decreed anything because he foresaw it in the future, or because it would come to pass [anyway] under certain conditions.<sup>5</sup>

It is absolutely true that God is sovereign and that all He does is according to the good pleasure of His own will (Eph. 1:5). However, the above statements contain both truth and error. God is the Creator and Lord of all things. He does have a program and plan that neither mankind nor Satan nor angels can change or prevent (Is. 46:10-11). God does as He pleases (Ps. 115:6). God is not answerable to mankind. Mankind certainly is not able to judge God (Rom. 9:20). God will do all that He pleases and all He wills.

But, has God planned and determined every little incident in every life? The 1689 confession sounds like He does, when it says, "God has decreed all things that occur" and that He directs all things. Berkhof wrote, "He has sovereignly determined from all eternity whatsoever will come to pass ..." <sup>6</sup> All things? Think of some sin in your life that you did and that you are still ashamed of. Did God plan and determine that you would do that? Was it God's will for you to do that, even though He declared it a sin and said it was not His will? Is God schizophrenic or double minded? Did God decree that Adam would sin, thereby damning untold billions throughout history? Certainly, God knew Adam would sin and chose to permit him to do it. But did God condemn Adam and his descendants for that sin, declaring it to have been contrary to His will, when all the time it really was secretly His will? Is God true when He speaks? There is not a single word of Scripture that says what these people have said. It cannot be found.

Let's be logical about this a moment. The Confession tells us that God is not the author of sin, does not participate in sinning, and does not violate the will of the creature (you and me). Yet, by saying that "God has decreed all things that occur" and "whatsoever will