

CHAPTER 8

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND ELECTION

WCF 3:3-8, WLC 13

[Cf. for predestination, John Murray, “Calvin, Dort, and Westminster on Predestination—a Comparative Study,” ch. 8 of *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Essays for the commemoration of the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619), ed. by Peter Y. DeJong, also in *Works* 4/ch. 13.]

Definition of Election

God’s sovereign choosing of those who would become the recipients of the blessings obtained through the covenant of grace.

Biblical terms used for election

The Bible teaches that God made such a selection, and uses various terms to describe it; for example:

בָּחַר *bāḥar*, “choose”

Deut 4:37, “Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them.”

Deut 7:6-7, “The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous.”

αἶρέω *haireo*, “take, choose”

2 Thess 2:13, “from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth”

ἐκλέγομαι *eklegomai*, “elect, choose”; ἐκλογή *ekloge*, “election, choosing”; and ἐκλεκτός *eklektos*, “elected, chosen”

Eph 1:4, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

1 Thess 1:4, “we know that he has chosen you” (ASV, “knowing your election”)

1 Pet 1:1, “Peter, . . . to God’s elect”

τάσσω *tasso*, “appoint, ordain”

Acts 13:48, “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”

προγινώσκω *proginosko*, “foreknow”; and πρόγνωσις *prognosis*, “foreknowledge”

Rom 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”

Rom 11:2, “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.”

1 Pet 1:1-2, “To God’s elect, . . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”

προορίζω *proörizo*, “foreordain, predestine”

Rom 8:29-30, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. . . . And those he predestined, he also called”

Eph 1:5, “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance to his pleasure and will”

Eph 1:11, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will”

προτίθημι *protithemi*, “purpose”

Eph 1:9, “. . . the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ”

προετοιμάζω *proetoimazo*, “prepare beforehand”

Rom 9:23, “the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory”

Eph 2:10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Objects of God's election

While the main emphasis of this chapter is on election of sinners to salvation, the term can be more general.

1. Christ

1 Pet 1:20, “He [Christ] was chosen (Greek, “foreknown”) before the creation of the world”

1 Pet 2:6, “a chosen and precious cornerstone”

2. Angels

1 Tim 5:21, “in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels”

3. Israel

Isa 45:4, “For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen”

4. Individuals for a task

Acts 9:15, “This man [Paul] is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”

Gal 1:15, But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased

5. Believers

Eph 1:4-5, etc. (see above section “Biblical terms used for election”)

Defense of the doctrine of election

1. The verses and terms cited above clearly teach this doctrine.

2. This doctrine is implied by passages which refer to God's people before their salvation:

Matt 1:21, "he will save his people from their sins"

John 17:2, "that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him"

Acts 18:10, "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city [Corinth]."

3. Election is a necessary consequence of the doctrine of divine sovereignty.

Eph 1:11, "the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will"

Cf. the argument concerning king Cyrus in Isa 44-45; Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, links these concepts well; see also the good discussion in Gordon H. Clark, *The Atonement*, sect. 18 (pp. 122-137).

4. The doctrine of election is necessary to explain salvation, assuming that man in his sinful condition is totally depraved—i.e., totally unable of himself to come to salvation.

5. Election is abundantly illustrated by biblical history; cf. esp. Rom 9:6-24.

6. The commands and illustrations of prayer for the unsaved found in Scripture and in Christian practice imply an underlying belief in divine election.

The criteria of election

Not the will of man:

John 1:13, "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God"

Rom 9:16, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Not the works of man:

Rom 9:11, 16, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand . . . It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Rom 11:5-6, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.”

2 Tim 1:9, “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace”

But God’s own grace and sovereign pleasure:

Eph 1:5, 11, “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . . In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will”

Eph 2:7, “[God raised us up] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

2 Tim 1:9, “who saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace”

The relation of election to foreknowledge

Arminian and Calvinistic views contrasted

The Arminian view of this doctrine is “conditional election,” i.e., God does indeed elect the saved ones, but he does so on the basis of what he foresees: if they will believe, then he elects them; if they will reject the gospel message, then he does not elect them. Thus God’s election is conditioned by his foreknowledge, which is merely cognitive. Cf. the statements from the Lutheran and Remonstrant positions reproduced in A. A. Hodge *Outlines of Theology*, 234-36.

Verses commonly used by Arminians in this regard are

Rom 8:29, “For those God foreknew he also predestined”

1 Pet 1:1-2, “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God”

It is interesting to note the vague wording of the Old Scofield Bible in the note on foreknowledge at 1 Pet 1:19-20 (cf. at Eph 1:5), and the progress in the New Scofield Bible at 1 Pet 1:20 and 5:13 (cf. at Eph 1:11 also). However, the New Scofield does not seem to understand foreknowledge as much more than cognition.

Old Scofield (1917): “The divine order is foreknowledge, election, predestination. That foreknowledge determines the election or choice is clear from 1 Pet. 1:2, and predestination is the bringing to pass of the election. ‘Election looks back to foreknowledge; predestination forward to the destiny.’ But Scripture nowhere declares what it is in the divine foreknowledge which determines the divine election and predestination. The foreknown are elected and the elect are predestinated, and this election is certain to every believer by the mere fact that he believes (1 Thess. 1:4-5).”

New Scofield (1967): “The sovereign choice of God in foreordination, election, and predestination logically originated in the divine decision based on His eternal omniscience of all possible plans of action. The order logically, not chronologically, is omniscience, divine decision (foreordination, election, predestination), and foreknowledge. As God’s decision is eternal, however, so also His foreknowledge is eternal. As foreknowledge extends to all events, it includes all that is embraced in election, foreordination, and predestination. Election is, therefore, according to foreknowledge, and foreknowledge is according to election, meaning that both are in perfect agreement. . . . Election is according to the foreknowledge of God, and wholly by grace, apart from human merit. And election proceeds from the divine volition.”

The Calvinistic view is “unconditional election,” i.e., God elects the saved ones apart from any faith or works which God might foresee in them; he views them as sinners, no more deserving of salvation or tending to salvation than the non-elect. This view is based on a more biblical understanding of the concept “to foreknow.” Cf. Canons of the Synod of Dort, First Head: “Of Divine Predestination,” esp. Art. 9-10 (Schaff *Creeds of Christendom* 3:583).

Arguments for the Calvinistic view of foreknowledge

1. The words *know* or *knowledge* often denote intimate personal fellowship, not merely knowledge about someone.

Gen 4:1 (ASV), “And the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived”

Matt 1:25 (ASV), “and he knew her not till she had brought forth a son”

(These two passages speaking of sexual union)

Jer 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart”

Amos 3:2, “You only have I chosen (ASV, “known”) of all the families of the earth.”

Matt 7:23, “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

1 Cor 8:3, “But the man who loves God is known by God.”

Gal 4:9, “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back”

2 Tim 2:19, “Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his’ (Gk. aorist, “the Lord knew” or “has known”)

2. Foreknowledge is more than omniscience, the knowledge of all things possible. In the NT foreknowledge is related to events two times (Acts 2:23; 2 Pet 3:17), but is related directly to people five times (Acts 26:5; Rom 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 19-20). The term has been described as showing “a previously determined or established loving relationship”

E.g., Rom 11:2a, “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.”

3. In Acts 2:23 foreknowledge is grammatically linked via the single article and *kai* to “determined counsel,” indicating that the two concepts are considered in that context as one entity. Granville Sharp Rule; cf. Moulton *Syntax* 3:181-82.

Acts 2:23, This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

4. In Rom 8:29, a verse often quoted by Arminians, note that the very same people who are foreknown are eventually glorified; only the saved are “foreknown.”

Rom 8:29, For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

5. In 1 Pet 1:1-2, the other passage most often cited by Arminians, note that the believers were “elect according to foreknowledge unto obedience,” not “foreknowledge of obedience.” The obedience spoken of here is conversion, resulting in justification. This passage

clearly demonstrates that faith and repentance are not the cause of election or foreknowledge, but the results.

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

The purpose of election

Election always is linked to a spiritual or ethical goal:

Eph 1:4, “For he chose us . . . to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Eph 2:10, “good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”

Rom 8:29, “he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son”

The ultimate purpose of this election is the glory of God:

Eph 1:11-12, “In him we were also chosen, . . . in order that we . . . might be for the praise of his glory.”

1 Pet 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, . . . that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

The preaching of election

1. The preaching of election always should be linked to moral and spiritual ends. (see verses above)
2. The preaching of election always should be linked to the assertion of human responsibility to believe the gospel. Notice this pattern in biblical preaching:

Election

Matt 11:25-27
Luke 22:21-22a

Responsibility

Matt 11:28-30
Luke 22:22b

John 6:37a
Rom 9:16, 18, 21

John 6:37b
Rom 10:6-13

3. The preaching of election may often follow the preaching of the gospel, especially to those who appear to be hardened. Such preaching has been very effective (e.g., Edwards, Spurgeon). Such often was Christ's pattern:

Gospel

Election

Matt 11:20-24
Luke 4:17-22
John 6:35-36
John 6:38-40
John 10:7-9

Matt 11:25-27
Luke 4:23-27
John 6:37
John 6:44-45
John 10:26-27

4. The preaching of election is useful and necessary for the saints.

See esp. WCF 3:8. "The doctrine . . . is to be handled with special prudence and care, . . . So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the gospel."