

Elect by God's Grace

I Peter 1:1-2

As we begin today's message I want to mention a couple of things. Our topic today is one that has been discussed and debated since the days of the early church fathers. You may or may not agree with me on this issue. That's okay. This is a topic that a lot of Pastors choose not to discuss because it can be controversial, even divisive. I am going to present you God's Word and let it speak. Now, I will give you my understanding, but this is God's Word. As I have studied and prayed I will do my best to teach this in way that will be as clear as I can. I also want to say that I don't have all the answers regarding this topic. If scholars and pastors who are a whole lot smarter than me can't agree on this, who am I to claim to have the definitive word on the subject. If someone like Augustine who was a brilliant Christian thinker can in the course of his life alter his position on this issue, then I also need to be open as well as I seek to be led by God's Spirit to teach me. I always pray that I might accurately handle God's Word as I preach and I would ask you to be open minded and let God's Spirit teach and lead you – either to confirm your own position or to perhaps change it based on a new understanding of what the Bible says.

Our topic is one that we could spend weeks studying and still just scratch the surface. I'll do my best to condense it down into one message. From the passage we are looking at today the topic of discussion will be about election and God's sovereignty. Does man have any say in his salvation, which brings up the issue of free will or man's responsibility? Time will not allow us today to go into great detail so I'll do my best to lay some groundwork as I share what I believe God's Word has to say on this topic.

Let me also mention a couple of resources that have been of tremendous help to me. The first is a book by J.I. Packer titled *Evangelism and the Sovereignty*

of God. There are some who believe and teach that evangelism is not necessary because an elect person will get saved regardless. When William Carey wanted to go another country to evangelize the lost, one elder stated that if God wanted to save the heathen He would do it without any help from Carey. William Carey went anyway.

The second resource is a book by theologian Norm Geisler titled *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*.

I want to be clear and say at the outset of the message that I believe the Bible teaches both the election of God and the responsibility of man. To deny divine election is to deny the sovereignty of God. We cannot avoid it because it is in the text. So what does it mean that He elects? But neither can we ignore that whosoever will may come and whoever comes to Me I will not cast out. So which is it? For me it is not an either/or but a both/and that is taught in Scripture and while we want there to be one or the other, God, who is infinitely wise, has resolved these seemingly two opposite ideas. It's what scholars call an antinomy which means a contradiction between two apparently equally valid principles or between inferences correctly drawn from such principles.

Does election mean that God alone chooses and man has no say in the matter? The extreme Calvinist would make that claim, that regardless of your will if you are elect you will become saved whether you want to or not.

Does free will mean that man alone makes the decision of salvation apart from any assistance by God believing that He is somehow passive in the process?

Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon about how to reconcile these two truths and Spurgeon responded that he never reconciled friends. They don't have to be contradictory. They are compatible.

Whether or not you will agree with me, at the end of the day, I want us to agree on one very important and eternal truth – salvation is all about God and His grace. We can't earn it and we don't deserve it, that's why it's a gift.

With that, open your Bible's once again to the book of I Peter where we began on a journey last week to discover who and why the Apostle Peter wrote this letter. We talked about the author, the authority by which he wrote, and then the audience. He wrote to both Jews and Greeks who were scattered as strangers in what is now modern day Turkey. They were strangers not because they were just passing through as if they were migrating to another country, but they were strangers because this world was not their permanent home. This is only a temporary residence on the way to an eternal home prepared in heaven. We concluded with some application. Like them, we too as Christians are strangers waiting for our eternal residence. In the meantime we have an audience with whom we are charged by the same authority given to Peter to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to those around us. That is our calling and our commission.

In your Bible's follow as I read I Peter 1:1-2.

Verse 2 very clearly shows us that each member of the Godhead, the trinity, Father, Son and Spirit are all involved in the process of salvation through this election.

Election is by the "foreknowledge of God."

Election is by the "sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit."

Christians are elect "that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood."

The origin of God's election is based on His foreknowledge.

The way election becomes real in our lives is through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The goal of election is to obey Christ and benefit from His cleansing blood.

Peter includes this in his description of these believers because their election alienated them, not because it's a controversial topic, but because they were rejected by the world that either didn't understand or completely rejected the gospel. As a result these believers were suffering and Peter wanted to encourage them in their trials.

Referring to them as God's elect was a way to remind them of how very special they were to God. Peter is going to give them practical instruction for living the Christian life in times of trial that is based on doctrine. Be wary of any teacher who gives practical instruction to the exclusion of doctrine. Without doctrine there is no firm foundation to anchor practical Christian living.

Peter begins by showing us that doctrine and practical Christianity are inseparable. When rightly applied doctrine is very practical. Right living always comes from right doctrine.

Your salvation should always lead to practical application. If we don't do anything with what we learn all that knowledge only makes us puffed up. When it comes to the practical nature of the doctrine of election John Piper writes, Peter puts election behind you because it was through the foreknowledge of God. He puts election in you by the sanctifying work of the Spirit and He puts election in front of you to obey Christ and be secure in His blood.

Peter very carefully chooses his words in the introduction regarding his audience that describes who they are and how they came to have a relationship with God. He calls them the elect. Now the NIV inserts in the beginning of verse the phrase "elect of God" which is not in the Greek text. It is assumed based on the context of the passage. In the Greek the word elect actually appears in the middle of verse 1 as a modifier of those who are strangers. The NIV has chosen to use the term to describe who Peter is writing to. But

notice that he didn't call them brothers or Christians or the church, but specifically and deliberately referred to them as chosen or elect.

It is a compound word in the Greek – eklektos ek – meaning from lego – meaning to gather or pick out. It literally means someone picked out or chosen. Thirteen years ago when we were looking for a dog, we went to the Humane Society to choose from among many other dogs, one dog in particular.

In 8th grade I was chosen along with 4 other teammates to be a starter on the basketball team.

In 12th grade I was chosen by my cross country coach as the MVP and then later that year selected among all the seniors to be recipient of the American Legion Award.

This past November Donald Trump was chosen to be the next President. Scripture teaches that the believer is chosen by God, but unlike my being chosen because of certain qualifications, God's election of some over others is not based on any merit you may have. Scripture says the believer was chosen before the foundation of the world. It's not based on looks or race or gender or age or social status. It is by His love and grace.

About this election Wycliffe's Bible Encyclopedia states that election is "God's divine choice of some individuals out of all mankind to become His own through regeneration and salvation."

The word is used of Christ who was chosen by God as the Messiah. Luke 23:35 "The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the Chosen One.'"

The word is also used of angels who are chosen "to be of especially high rank and administrative

association with God or as His messengers to human beings." (Wycliffe's Bible Encyclopedia) I Timothy 5:21 "I charge you, in the sight of God and Jesus Christ and the elect angels..."

Jesus used the word to refer to believers. Matthew 24:22 "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."

Matthew 24:24 "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible."

Matthew 24:31 "And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Paul used the term to refer to believers. Romans 8:33 "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies."

Colossians 3:12 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved..."

II Timothy 2:10 "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they may obtain salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."

John used the term to refer to believers. Revelation 17:14 "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers."

Ephesians 1:4 states that the believer has been chosen before the foundation of the earth. Verse 5 continues by saying we were chosen in Christ to be adopted into God's family. In 2:10 we were chosen to do good works. In Romans 8:29 we were chosen to conform to Christ and in Romans 9:23 we were

chosen for eternal glory.

God's election of the believer is based on His grace and love and not on any merit of the individual.

Ephesians 1:4-5

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 5:8

Romans 9:11; 11:5

Back to our verse in I Peter 1, our verse also says that election is by the foreknowledge of God.

Foreknowledge literally means to know beforehand. From that definition we could claim to have some foreknowledge.

We can look next week or next month or next year and know with accuracy when the sun will rise and when the sun will set, when the next full moon will occur or when the next solar eclipse will happen. We know the next time Haley's Comet will pass by.

But the word foreknowledge means more than just knowledge about something that will take place in the future. When referring to the foreknowledge of God Louis Sperry Chafer adds it is "that which He Himself purposes to bring to pass." The act of God's foreknowledge is based on His sovereignty that He is in control of all things bringing about His sovereign and divine purpose. Let me also say that foreknowledge is different than His omniscience or all knowing. Foreknowledge has to do with things in the future. Omniscience has to do with His knowing all things that to us are past, present or future.

Again Chafer adds "Foreknowing in God should be distinguished from His knowledge of events which are merely possible. It is in the range of divine understanding to foresee what would happen under certain circumstances but in His providence never does occur." For example when Christ declared that if the same miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon that were demonstrated in Chorazin and Bethsaida, they would have repented.

Dr. Hodge in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that "Divine foreknowledge is

simply God's knowledge of His own eternal purpose." Adding from Romans 8:29-30 that "those God predestinates, calls, justifies and glorifies are just those whom He has looked upon with this sovereign love" through His foreknowledge.

Foreknowledge also carries the idea of having a regard for or centering one's attention on. In that respect it parallels election in that God has His attention on those whom He chose before the world even came into existence.

Some scholars and teachers have chosen to define foreknowledge as God's ability to see all things so that when it comes to the issue of election they take both to mean that God knew who would choose to place their trust in Christ for salvation so He elected them based on that knowledge. But that simply ignores the true meaning and intent of the word as supported throughout Scripture and greatly diminishes the meaning of election. Instead of election being God's choice to save some, it has become solely man's choice apart from God's grace. They claim that man first chose God and so God in turn chose them.

Let me return to a helpful passage from Wycliffe's Bible Encyclopedia which says election is "God's foreknowledge as to what a man will do in his own freedom, but is dependent for its accomplishment upon God's sovereign grace. The Scriptures teach that God takes up what man will do in his freedom, and adds to this what He will do in His grace to save a man, to make effective His election of an individual."

Now, let me give a little history that I hope will prove beneficial.

In the fourth century the controversy between election and free will began in force when Pelagius argued for the ability of the natural man (the sinner) to accept Christ without sovereign grace. This heresy became known as Pelagianism. Pelagianism views humanity as basically good and morally

unaffected by the Fall. It denies that Adam's sin was passed on to all mankind (man essentially is born with a clean slate and we choose to sin making us a sinner). It denies total depravity that every person born into the world is morally corrupt and enslaved to sin and apart from God's grace he is utterly unable to choose to follow God or turn to Christ for salvation; and it denies substitutionary atonement – that Christ took our place. It simultaneously views man as fundamentally good and in possession of permissive free will. With regards to salvation, it teaches that man has the ability in and of himself (apart from divine aid) to obey God and earn eternal salvation. Pelagianism is overwhelmingly incompatible with the Bible and was opposed by Augustine who refuted its teaching.

The Catholic Church adopted this view with the addition that man needed seven kinds of ascending grace in order to attain salvation. Ultimately man is in control of his own destiny not God.

Two subsequent views emerged – one following the teachings of Augustine and the other following the teachings of Pelagius. Arminius came along and modified the teaching of Pelagius. Some called it semi-Pelagianism, others called it Arminianism. Both Methodists and Wesleyans follow this theology. Since man chooses God, man can unchoose God.

On the other hand the teachings of Augustine and other early church fathers were picked up by many of the Reformers including and especially John Calvin. He was a strong proponent of the sovereignty of God. Proponents of Calvinism teach Five Points of doctrine regarding salvation which many know to be the acrostic TULIP. My research showed that it was not Calvin who developed these five points but followers of Calvinism who developed it to refute the five main points of Arminianism.

Here are the five main points of Calvinism from the

Westminster Confession.

Total depravity – Because of his fall into sin, man has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation. As a natural man he is opposed to doing any good and is dead in sin, unable by his own strength to save himself or even to prepare himself for any spiritual insight.

Unconditional election – God decreed for the purpose of His glory that some men are predestined for eternal life and others are predestined to everlasting death. The extreme Calvinist would say that man has no choice in the matter. He will be saved because God decreed it through election. As I said earlier the extreme Calvinist would say that evangelism is unnecessary.

Limited atonement – God decreed from eternity past to justify the elect and when the time was right Christ died for their sins and rise again for their justification, but they are not justified until the Holy Spirit actually applies it to them. In effect they are saying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was sufficient only for the elect and no one else. The death of Christ only satisfied the debt of the elect.

Irresistible grace – God's Spirit will enlighten the minds of the elect so that in His appointed time they will understand the things of God regarding salvation. God will then take away their heart of stone, and give them a heart of flesh, renewing their will to do that which is good, drawing them to Christ as they come freely, being made willing by His grace which they cannot resist.

Perseverance of the saints – Those whom God has accepted in His beloved, successfully called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end and be eternally saved.

Let's remember that Jesus said in John 15:16 we did not choose Him, but He chose us. Our choosing God is based on Him choosing us first, not our

choosing Him first and Him going along with it. This goes back to His foreknowledge where He acknowledges them as His.

In Psalm 1:6 we read that “The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” God knows His people and is approving and acknowledging of them.

That God chose some before the foundation of the world means that before we were born, before we had done anything good or bad He chose us based on His foreknowledge and grace. It’s not based on any religion. It’s not based on the family we were born into. It’s not based on the country we live in. It isn’t base on any merit of our own. He chose us based solely on His grace and love.

The extreme Calvinist would say that no one can be sure he is one of the elect until he gets to heaven. That does not give me any peace or security to not know if I’m one of the elect until I die. They support this with the verse that says that some will say to the Lord at judgment after they have been sentenced to an eternity in hell “Lord didn’t we do things in your name and so on at which the Lord tells them to depart because He doesn’t know them. But then Arminianism doesn’t give me any peace either if I believe I can lose my salvation at any time.

Bruce Barton provides some clarity at least for me on the balance between the election and foreknowledge of God and man’s responsibility when he writes “God alone originates and accomplishes our salvation because of His grace. We do nothing to earn it. God’s choice of each believer is based on several important truths. It is based on His gracious mercy, so that there is no room for pride. It is based on His decision in eternity past, so that there is no room for us to doubt our salvation or future in heaven. It is based on His sovereign control, so there is no room for fatalism. (We should marvel not that He

withholds mercy from some, but that He gives grace to any.) John Newton the author of Amazing Grace once said that when he got to heaven he would be amazed at the people who are there he didn’t think would be, he would be amazed at the people who aren’t there he thought would be, but most of all he would be amazed that he was there. That is God’s grace.

Finally, it is based on His love for us is provided in Christ, so there is no room for apathy. Such love should motivate us to willing obedience and make us change in character.”

Barton continues “Being ‘chosen’ according to God’s foreknowledge in no way removes the necessity for people to choose to follow Him. The fact that God knows all events and decisions beforehand, even ordains them beforehand, does not mean that He forces the actions of His creatures, leaving them no choice.

God’s choice has more to do with His love and generosity. First, God’s foreknowledge means that He took the initiative and chose people before they had done anything to deserve it. Second, God had intimate knowledge of these future believers; He knew who would believe, and He knew them personally...as a father knows his children. Third, God makes His choice effective by the presence of the Holy Spirit in those who believe, resulting in obedience. They were chosen not against their own will.”

We see that in I Peter 1:20 where the Father knew the Son intimately and knew before the foundation of the world that He would die for the sins of the world but did not force Christ to pay the penalty for sin. Christ freely chose to do that.

Let me add here that as Peter writes he is making the statement that because God knew them and chose them before the foundation of the world, He knew about their persecution.

When it comes to choosing between election and

the sovereignty of God vs. the free will in man's responsibility what seems to be a problem for us because we like to have things resolved in our minds is not a problem for God. Let's remember that He is infinitely wise and His knowledge and understanding are beyond our comprehension. Whether we can reconcile these both in our minds isn't important because God already has and He didn't need our council to do it.

Scripture teaches the election of God.

Scripture also teaches the responsibility of man.

John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away."

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Acts 2:21 "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Acts 10:43 "All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Acts 16:30b-31 "'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.'"

John Phillips explains it this way: "God does not give His creation wills of their own, with the power of choice and personal accountability for their behavior, and then act as though they had no such thing. God's election of certain numbers of the human family to become members of the heavenly family takes into full account the response of each individual when confronted by the Holy Spirit with the offer of salvation."

Let me ask you a question to consider. Does it make sense that God would give us a free will in the area of choosing some things, but not other things?

Genesis 1:31 teaches us that man was created good. As a matter of fact, man was created perfect and with a will to choose right and wrong.

Genesis 2:16 teaches us that man was created with a free will to choose. In the garden God told Adam he could eat of any tree in the garden except from the tree of good and evil. He then gave the reason. If you do, you will die. Man was clearly given the ability and opportunity to obey or not obey and this was when man was still in his original state of perfection before the fall.

That man made a conscious choice to exercise that will and disobey is also clearly taught in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden fruit.

Puritan and Calvinist Pastor/author Stephen Charnock stated "God foresaw that Adam would fall, and fall freely."

Norm Geisler writes "God made the fact of freedom; we are responsible for the acts of freedom. The fact of freedom is good, even though the acts of freedom are evil. God is the cause of the former and we are the cause of the latter."

Cain was presented with a choice in Genesis 4. When both he and Abel brought their sacrifices to God, his was rejected. Cain became angry. God responded by saying "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (v. 7)

God's condemnation of their sin shows that they had a free will to choose to do wrong. Man can perceive the truth but can choose to reject it.

Romans 1:18-20

Paul says here that the unsaved clearly understood, but deliberately chose to refuse to believe and accept it.

Other passages teach man's free will.

I Peter 5:2

II Corinthians 9:7

Matthew 23:37

John 1:12

II Peter 3:9

Deuteronomy 30:19

Joshua 24:15

John 8:24

John 12:35-42

Stubborn unbelief brought blindness and rejection.

In Acts 27:22-23, 31 we see that when the ship Paul was on was in the storm, the angel of the Lord revealed to Paul that those who chose to stay on the ship would be predestined to live, but those who chose to leave the ship would perish. It was their choice.

W.G.T. Shedd who was a moderate Calvinist says "Man is responsible for sin because he is both the author and the actor of it; but he is not responsible for holiness, because he is only the actor... The sinner is free in accepting or rejecting the invitation of the gospel. If he accepts them, he does so freely without this actuation and solely by his own self-determination."

The Bible teaches both the sovereignty of God in choosing and in man's responsibility to believe.

Ephesians 2:8-9

If we believe what Scripture teaches all mankind is savable, but not all mankind will be saved. God chose us and we in response choose to accept His invitation. Otherwise, if it is solely because of God's irresistible grace taught by the extreme Calvinist then we are forced and not free to believe. One author wrote that "True love is always persuasive, but never forceful."

We clearly see from John 3:16 that those who believe will not perish but have everlasting life. Or how about II Peter 3:9 which states that "God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should

come to repentance."

We are elect by God's grace with the ability to freely accept or reject His open invitation to receive by faith the gift of eternal life through His Son.

A Pastor friend once asked "how do I know if I'm elect?" Like the tax collector in the temple pray "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

"Call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved."

"Whosoever believes on Him will not perish but have everlasting life."

As I said at the beginning you may not agree with my position on this issue, but the question isn't whether or not you hold either Calvinism or Arminianism, the question is do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior?