

Chosen in Him: Unconditional Election and Particular Redemption

An executive summary of the biblical, confessional, and historical case,
in the Reformed tradition

Scripture quotations are from the **Legacy Standard Bible (LSB)**,
checked against read.lsbible.org. Footnote markers, cross-reference
letters, and small-caps formatting have been removed.

1. Executive Overview

The answer up front. Scripture teaches that before the foundation of the world, God the Father chose in Christ a definite people out of fallen humanity for salvation. He did not base that choice on any faith, works, or merit He foresaw in them. He based it on "the good pleasure of His will" (Ephesians 1:5), "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:6). Because God chose them, He also sent His Son to redeem them (particular redemption), His Spirit to call them effectually, and His power to keep them to glory (Romans 8:29–30).

Why "Reformed theology," not "Calvinism." Calvin did not invent the doctrine. He inherited it from Paul, from Jesus' teaching in John 6, 10 and 17, and from the Old Testament's account of God choosing Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6–8). Augustine defended it a thousand years before Calvin, and Luther defended it against Erasmus before Calvin

wrote the Institutes. Spurgeon called these doctrines the ones "called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus." John MacArthur says the term is "a little bit too narrow a definition because this kind of teaching was not exclusively John Calvin's teaching." The confessions that state the doctrine, the Canons of Dort (1619), the Westminster Confession (1646), and the Second London Baptist Confession (1689), present it as the teaching of Scripture.

What election is not: - It is **not fatalism**. God ordains the means, which are preaching, faith, and repentance, as well as the end (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 10:14). - It is **not based on foreseen faith**. Faith is the fruit of election, not its cause (Acts 13:48; Canons of Dort I.9). - It does **not make God the author of sin**. The reprobate are passed by and judged for their own sin (WCF 3.7; Dort I.15). - It does **not silence evangelism**. The gospel is to be preached "without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people" (Dort II.5).

How this document separates three things: - **What the text says:** the quoted LSB verses. - **What the Reformed tradition teaches:** the confessions and teachers. - **Synthesis:** the brief exegetical notes that connect the two.

2. The Biblical Case: Major Texts

2.1 Old Testament: God's Free Choice of Israel

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 (LSB)

"For you are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for His own treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. Yahweh did not set His affection on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because Yahweh loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your fathers..."

Exegesis. The text gives no reason for the choice except God's love, and that love is not explained by anything in Israel. Israel's national election is not identical to individual election to salvation (Romans 9:6: "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel"). It does set the pattern for all of God's choosing: He chooses freely, for His own reasons, and not because of anything in the people chosen. Calvin argues from this same passage (Institutes 3.21.5).

Isaiah 46:9-10 (LSB)

"...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My counsel will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'..."

Exegesis. Election is one application of God's sovereign counsel over all things (compare Ephesians 1:11).

2.2 Jesus: The Father's Gift, the Son's Sheep (John 6, 10, 15, 17)

John 6:37-39 (LSB)

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. Now this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

John 6:44 (LSB)

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:65 (LSB)

"...no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

Exegesis. The order of events is fixed. The Father gives a people to the Son. All of those given come. All who come are kept, and all are raised. In verse 44 the one who is drawn is the same one who is raised ("him... him"), so the drawing cannot be a universal influence that might fail. Verse 37 also carries a free offer: "the one who comes to Me I will never cast out."

John 10:26-29 (LSB)

"But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

Exegesis. Jesus does not say "you are not My sheep because you do not believe." He says the reverse: "you do not believe because you are not of My sheep." Belonging to the flock comes before believing and explains it.

John 15:16 (LSB)

"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would abide..."

John 17:2, 6, 9 (LSB)

"...even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life." (17:2) "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word." (17:6) "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours." (17:9)

Exegesis. The Son has authority "over all flesh" but gives eternal life to "all whom You have given Him." His high-priestly intercession is particular, "not on behalf of the world." This connects election directly to particular redemption (Section 4).

2.3 Acts: Appointed, Then Believing

Acts 13:48 (LSB)

"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

Exegesis. Luke does not say that as many as believed were appointed. He says those who had been appointed (a pluperfect passive participle in Greek) believed. Appointment comes first and faith follows. Spurgeon: "it says, 'ordained to eternal life' in the original as plainly as it possibly can."

2.4 Paul: Romans 8 and 9

Romans 8:28-30 (LSB)

"And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestined, He also

called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified."

Exegesis. This is the "golden chain" (Dort I, Rejection II). The same group is in every link, and no one drops out between being called and being glorified. The calling must therefore be effectual, not merely an outward invitation. "Foreknew" has a person as its object ("those whom"). It means God's prior covenant love and knowledge of those persons (compare Amos 3:2; 1 Peter 1:20). It does not mean foreseeing the faith they would exercise. MacArthur argues this at length in *The Doctrine of Election*, Part 1 (GT 90-273).

Romans 8:33 (LSB)

"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies."

Romans 9:10-16 (LSB)

"And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that the purpose of God according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' What shall we say then? Is there any unrighteousness with God? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it does not depend on the one who wills or the one who runs, but on God who has mercy."

Romans 9:18-24 (LSB, selected)

"So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? ... Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ... and in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory—even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles?"

Exegesis. Three details settle the meaning. 1. The choice was made before the twins were born or had done "anything good or bad." That rules out works, and it equally rules out foreseen choices. 2. Paul expects two objections: "Is there unrighteousness

with God?" (v. 14) and "Why does He still find fault?" (v. 19). Nobody raises those objections against conditional election, which would look perfectly fair. They arise only against unconditional election. 3. Paul applies the principle to individuals, "even us, whom He also called," Jews and Gentiles (v. 24). He is not talking only about national roles in history.

R.C. Sproul: "God not only makes this decision prior to the twins' births, He does it without a view to anything they would do, either good or evil."

Romans 11:5-7 (LSB)

"In this way then, at the present time, a remnant according to God's gracious choice has also come to be. But if it is by grace, it is no longer of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. ... What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but the chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened."

2.5 Paul: Ephesians 1 and 2

Ephesians 1:4-6 (LSB)

"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved."

Ephesians 1:11 (LSB)

"In Him, we also have been made an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will."

Exegesis. Paul gives the timing ("before the foundation of the world"), the sphere ("in Him," that is, in Christ), the purpose ("that we would be holy," so holiness is the goal of election, not its ground), the cause ("the good pleasure of His will"), and the end ("to the praise of the glory of His grace"). Augustine summed it up: God chose us "not because we were going to be of ourselves holy and immaculate, but He chose and predestinated us that we might be so."

Ephesians 2:1, 8-9 (LSB)

"And you were dead in your transgressions and sins..." (2:1) "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast." (2:8-9)

Exegesis. The dead cannot make themselves alive. If election rested on foreseen faith, the deciding factor in salvation would be something the sinner supplies. That leaves room to boast, which verse 9 rules out.

2.6 Paul: 2 Timothy 1:9 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13

2 Timothy 1:9 (LSB)

"...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."

2 Thessalonians 2:13 (LSB)

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

Exegesis. Grace was "given to us... from all eternity," before we existed to deserve it. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, God chose people for salvation, through the means of the Spirit's sanctifying work and faith in the truth. Election does not bypass faith. It produces faith. This was the text of Spurgeon's 1855 sermon "Election."

2.7 Peter: Chosen Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2 (LSB)

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood..."

1 Peter 2:9 (LSB)

"But you are a chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Exegesis. Election appears in every person of the Trinity: the Father foreknows, the Spirit sanctifies, and the Son's blood is sprinkled. In 1 Peter 1:20 the same apostle uses "foreknown" of Christ Himself, which plainly means "foreordained," not "foreseen as believing." MacArthur notes that Peter opens the letter this way "without pretension... without explanation."

3. Supporting Texts

Each verse below is LSB wording checked on read.lsbible.org.

- **Matthew 11:27** — "...nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." The Son reveals the Father to whom He wills.
- **Matthew 22:14** — "For many are called, but few are chosen." Distinguishes the general call from election.
- **Matthew 24:24** — "...so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect." The elect are kept.
- **Mark 13:20** — "...but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days." Jesus says "the elect, whom He chose."
- **Luke 18:7** — "Now, will God not bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night..." "Elect" as a name for God's people.
- **John 11:51-52** — "...that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Christ's death gathers a people already called "children of God."
- **Acts 16:14** — "...whose heart the Lord opened to pay attention to the things spoken by Paul." God opens the heart before Lydia responds.
- **Acts 18:9-10** — "...go on speaking and do not be silent; ... for I have many people in this city." Election motivates evangelism. These people are Christ's before they believe.
- **Romans 3:10-11** — "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God." No one, left to himself, would seek God.

- **1 Corinthians 1:27-29** — "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise... so that no flesh may boast before God." Election removes grounds for boasting.
- **Philippians 1:29** — "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Faith is granted.
- **Colossians 3:12** — "So, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion..." Election grounds ethics.
- **1 Thessalonians 1:4** — "knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election." Election can be known.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:9** — "For God has not appointed us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."
- **2 Timothy 2:10** — "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of the elect, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus..." Paul labors because there are elect to reach.
- **Titus 1:1** — "Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect..."
- **James 2:5** — "...did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom...?"
- **Revelation 13:8** — "...everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." The LSB footnote allows "written in the book... slain from the foundation of the world." Compare Revelation 17:8, which is not quoted here.
- **Deuteronomy 29:29** — "The secret things belong to Yahweh our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever..." The boundary for how far we inquire into election (Calvin, Institutes 3.21.3).

4. Particular Redemption (Limited / Definite Atonement), in Brief

How it relates to election. The Father chose a people, the Son came to redeem that people, and the Spirit applies the redemption to that people. The Trinity acts with one purpose. If the Son died to make salvation merely possible for everyone and certain for no one, the Son's intent would differ from the Father's. Sproul prefers the term "definite atonement": "God the Father designed the work of redemption specifically with a view to providing salvation for the elect, and... Christ died for His sheep and laid down His life for those the Father had given to Him."

Key texts (LSB): - **Matthew 1:21** — "...you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." He will save, which is more than making salvation possible. - **John 10:11, 15** — "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." / "...and I lay down My life for the sheep." Compare John 10:26: "you are not of My sheep." - **Ephesians 5:25** — "...just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." - **Titus 2:14** — "...who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness, and purify for Himself a people for His own possession..." - **Revelation 5:9** — "...You were slain and purchased for God with Your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." People "from" every nation: a purchase that actually took place, and is not universal.

"Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect." The Reformed tradition does not limit the value of Christ's death. The Canons of Dort II.3 say that it "is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world." What is definite is its saving design and effect: God willed that Christ "should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father" (Dort II.8). Spurgeon turned the charge of limiting the atonement back on his opponents: "General atonement is like a great wide bridge with only half an arch; it does not go across the stream... We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number."

Not Hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism denies or neglects the free and sincere offer of the gospel to all, or denies that unbelievers have a duty to repent and believe. Confessional Reformed theology rejects it: - Dort II.5: the gospel promise "ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people." - Dort III/IV.8: "all who are called through the gospel are called earnestly." - Spurgeon: "We must have divine sovereignty, and we must have man's responsibility." - MacArthur, asked about the "whosoever" texts: "I think we preach them. I think we preach whosoever will may come." He adds that the gospel offer "is absolutely the true heart of God; otherwise, God would be some kind of an actor."

5. Witnesses: Reformers, Confessions, and Teachers

All quotations below were read from the cited source this session. Where a source is secondary, it is labeled.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), the patristic antecedent

"Therefore God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestinating us to the adoption of children, not because we were going to be of ourselves holy and immaculate, but He chose and predestinated us that we might be so."

"For He chose us, not because we believed, but that we might believe, lest we should be said first to have chosen Him..."

— On the Predestination of the Saints, Book I. Text: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15121.htm>

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

"God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes, and does all things according to His immutable, eternal, and infallible will. By this thunderbolt, 'Free-will' is thrown prostrate, and utterly dashed to pieces."

"This is the highest degree of faith — to believe that He is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many; to believe Him just, who according to His own will, makes us necessarily damnable..."

— The Bondage of the Will (1525), Henry Cole translation, Sect. IX and the reply to Erasmus' Preface. Text: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.ix.xvi.html> ; full text <https://ccel.org/ccel/l/luther/bondage/cache/bondage.txt>

John Calvin (1509-1564)

"We shall never feel persuaded as we ought that our salvation flows from the free mercy of God as its fountain, until we are made acquainted with his eternal election, the grace of God being illustrated by the contrast—viz. that he does not adopt all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what he denies to others."

"Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness."

"We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment."

"In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election, and justification as another symbol of its manifestation, until it is fully accomplished by the attainment of glory."

— Institutes of the Christian Religion 3.21.1, 3.21.2, 3.21.7 (Beveridge translation).
Text: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.v.xxii.html>

Canons of Dort (1618-19)

"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... Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery." (I.7)

"This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition... but rather for the purpose of faith... Accordingly, election is the source of every saving good." (I.9)

"...the decree of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger." (I.15)

— CRCNA 2011 English translation: <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/canons-dort>

Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), Chapter 3

"Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future..." (3.2)

"Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace." (3.5)

— Text: <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster3.i.iii.html>

Second London Baptist Confession (1689), Chapter 3, as quoted by Spurgeon

"Those of mankind that are predestinated to life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory out of his mere free grace and love, without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto."

— As read in Spurgeon's sermon "Election" (1855), <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/election/>

George Whitefield (1714-1770)

"...instead of warping, does but more and more confirm me in the belief of the doctrine of God's eternal election."

"I frankly acknowledge: I believe the doctrine of reprobation, in this view, that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number, and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left of God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death which is its proper wages."

— Letter to the Rev. John Wesley in Answer to His Sermon Entitled "Free Grace" (1740). Modernized text: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Whitefield_to_Wesley ; Chapel Library edition: <https://www.chapellibrary.org/pdf/books/wltw.pdf> ; 1740 original wording: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N18499.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1&view=fulltext>

Note. "Reprobation" here means God's just passing by of sinners. The 1740 original reads somewhat differently ("the rest of mankind are left to perish under the imputation of Adam's guilt"). The quotation above follows the modernized edition.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

"From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased... It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me."

"I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God."

— Personal Narrative (c. 1740), in Works, vol. 1 (Hickman ed.). Text: <https://ccel.org/ccel/e/edwards/works1/cache/works1.txt> ; also <https://eada.lib.umd.edu/text-entries/personal-narrative/>

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

"I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, which are called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus."

"Faith is the gift of God. Every virtue comes from him. Therefore it cannot have caused him to elect men, because it is his gift."

"And if you ask me why he saves me, I can only say, because he would do it."

"If you want to be humbled, study election... He who is proud of his election is not elect; and he who is humbled under a sense of it may believe that he is."

"Whoever believes God's truth, and believes on Jesus Christ, is elect."

"We must have divine sovereignty, and we must have man's responsibility."

— "Election," sermon nos. 41-42, 2 September 1855: <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/election/>

"We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved but are saved, must be saved..."

— "Particular Redemption," sermon no. 181, 28 February 1858: <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/particular-redemption/>

R.C. Sproul (1939-2017), Ligonier Ministries

"The Reformed view of election, known as unconditional election, means that God does not foresee an action or condition on our part that induces Him to save us. Rather, election rests on God's sovereign decision to save whomever He is pleased to save."

"One group receives grace; the other receives justice. No one receives injustice."

"There are conditions that God decrees for salvation, not the least of which is putting one's personal trust in Christ. However, that is a condition for justification, and the doctrine of election is something else."

— "TULIP and Reformed Theology: Unconditional Election" (17 April 2021): <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/tulip-and-reformed-theology-unconditional-election>

"I don't think we want to believe in a God who sends Christ to die on the cross and then crosses His fingers, hoping that someone will take advantage of that atoning death."

— "TULIP and Reformed Theology: Limited Atonement" (8 April 2021): <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/tulip-and-reformed-theology-limited-atonement>

John MacArthur, Grace to You

"It is the doctrine that says God chooses those who will be saved. And He does so sovereignly, according to His own will and His own purpose, uninfluenced by any other person or by anything anyone does."

"I think if you truly understand the doctrine of election, you're going to be humbled by it, not made proud by it."

"We, in the faithful proclamation of the gospel, are the means by which God sovereignly saves those whom He has sovereignly chosen."

— "Answering the Key Questions About the Doctrine of Election" (GTY106): <https://www.gty.org/sermons/GTY106/answering-the-key-questions-about-the-doctrine-of-election>

"If God just looks down and sees who's going to make the decision, then his election is not based on his own free will, it's based on their merit, right?"

— "The Doctrine of Election, Part 1" (90-273, 2004): <https://www.gty.org/sermons/90-273/the-doctrine-of-election-part-1> ; see also "Who Chose Whom?" (GTY65): <https://www.gty.org/sermons/print/GTY65/who-chose-whom>

Francis Turretin (1623-1687), secondary citation

"Election was made from God's mere good pleasure . . . good pleasure excludes every cause out of God upon which election may depend."

— Quoted in Ligonier, "What Is Unconditional Election?": <https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/what-is-unconditional-election>. This is from Turretin's Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Topic IV. The primary text was not checked.

6. Common Objections and Biblical Answers

Objection 1: Free will and fairness. "If God chooses, I have no real choice, and it would be unjust to choose some and not others."

Verses commonly cited: Joshua 24:15 ("choose for yourselves today whom you will serve"); Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 23:37.

Answer. - The texts in context. Joshua 24:15 commands a choice. It does not claim that fallen people have the moral ability to choose God unaided. Commands show duty, not ability (Romans 3:10-11; Ephesians 2:1; John 6:44). People really do choose. The question is what moves the will. Dort III/IV.16 says grace does not treat people "as if they were blocks and stones," but "spiritually revives, heals, reforms... and bends it back." - Fairness. Paul expects exactly this objection (Romans 9:14, 19) and answers it with God's freedom to show mercy (9:15-16) and the potter's rights (9:20-21). Justice means getting what we deserve. Mercy is undeserved by definition, so it can be given freely. Sproul: "One group receives grace; the other receives justice. No one receives injustice." Dort I.1: "God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin." - Responsibility remains. MacArthur: "The sinner is fully culpable, fully accountable... for his own or her own sin." Spurgeon: "your damnation will be entirely your own fault."

Objection 2: "God desires all to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9)

1 Timothy 2:4-6 (LSB): "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all..."

2 Peter 3:9 (LSB): "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Answer. Reformed interpreters offer two readings, and they can work together. - Context of 1 Timothy 2. Paul has just urged prayer "for all men, for kings and all who are in authority" (2:1-2), that is, for every kind of person. The point is that no class of people is outside God's saving purpose. Spurgeon: "The words 'world' and 'all' are used in seven or eight senses in Scripture... The words are generally used to signify that Christ has redeemed some of all sorts." - Context of 2 Peter 3. The audience is "beloved" (3:8, LSB: "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved..."), and God "is patient toward you." Sproul: "The immediate antecedent of the word any in this passage is the word us... He's not speaking of all mankind indiscriminately." God delays the end so that all of His people are gathered in. - God's revealed and decretive will. Many

Reformed teachers also distinguish God's revealed will (what He commands and delights in) from His decretive will (what He ordains). God sincerely takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). Yet "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (Romans 9:18). Deuteronomy 29:29 gives the boundary. MacArthur affirms both: the gospel's pleading "is absolutely the true heart of God."

Objection 3: "Whosoever will" (John 3:16; Romans 10:13)

John 3:16 (LSB): "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Romans 10:13 (LSB): "for 'Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

Answer. Reformed theology affirms every word of these verses. They state what is true of whoever believes: everyone who believes will be saved. They do not say who will or can believe. Jesus answers that question three chapters later: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44). The Canons of Dort quote John 3:16 approvingly (I.2). The free offer is preached to all (Dort II.5), and the elect are gathered by it (Romans 10:14: "How will they hear without a preacher?"). Spurgeon: "If you love these things, he has elected you to them... God gives liberally to all those who desire; and first of all, he makes them desire."

Objection 4: Corporate election only. "God chose a group (the church, or Israel) for a role in history, not individuals for salvation."

Verses commonly cited: Romans 9 (read as nations: Jacob and Esau as Israel and Edom); Ephesians 1:4 ("us").

Answer. - Romans 9 concerns salvation. Paul's grief is that Israelites are "accursed" (9:3). The word of God has not failed because "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (9:6), and the conclusion is "vessels of mercy... even us, whom He also called" (9:23-24), a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles. - The texts name individuals: "the one who comes to Me" (John 6:37), "draws him" (6:44), "as many as had been appointed" (Acts 13:48), "whose names" written in the book of life (Revelation 13:8). - Spurgeon: "If you tell me that God chose the Jews, I say then, he chose that Jew, and that Jew, and that Jew... If it were not just to choose a person, it would be far more unjust to choose a nation." - Election is corporate in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). The body He chose is made up of particular persons.

Objection 5: Election based on foreseen faith. "God looked down the corridors of time, saw who would believe, and chose them" (often from Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2, "foreknowledge")

Answer. - "Foreknew" concerns persons, not their faith. Romans 8:29 says "those whom He foreknew," and in 1 Peter 1:20 Christ Himself is "foreknown," meaning foreordained. - Faith is the fruit of election, not its root. Acts 13:48, Philippians 1:29, Ephesians 2:8. Augustine: "He chose us, not because we believed, but that we might believe." Dort I.9: election is "for the purpose of faith," not "on the basis of foreseen faith." - Romans 9:11 rules it out. The choice was made before the twins had "done anything good or bad," and Paul expects the charge of unfairness, which foreseen-faith election would never provoke. - It makes the decisive factor human. MacArthur: "If God just looks down and sees who's going to make the decision, then his election is... based on their merit." Spurgeon: "God gives faith, therefore he could not have elected them on account of faith, which he foresaw." - WCF 3.2: God has not "decreed anything because he foresaw it as future."

Objection 6: Double-predestination caricatures. "God creates people in order to damn them, drags unwilling people to heaven, and keeps willing seekers out."

Answer. The confessions reject this caricature outright. - No symmetry of causation. Election is the cause of faith. Reprobation is not the cause of unbelief. God leaves sinners "in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves" and judges them "for their unbelief but also for all their other sins" (Dort I.15). The Canons list, among the "false accusations," the claim that "in the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness." - God is not the author of sin. WCF 3.1; Dort I.15 ("a blasphemous thought!"). - No willing seeker is turned away. "The one who comes to Me I will never cast out" (John 6:37). Spurgeon: "If thou goest to him, and askest him, thou shalt receive; for he ne'er has spurned one yet!" - For anxious souls. Dort I.16 counsels that those who "seriously desire to turn to God" ought "much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation."

A related objection: "Then why evangelize?"

Election guarantees that evangelism will bear fruit. "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking... for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). "I endure all things for the sake of the elect" (2 Timothy 2:10). "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19). MacArthur calls the fatalism charge "a straw man."

Whitefield, who preached to crowds in the tens of thousands, held to election throughout.

7. Confessional Note

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3 ("Of God's Eternal Decree"): - 3.1: God ordains whatsoever comes to pass, "yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures." - 3.2: The decree does not rest on foreknowledge of conditions. - 3.5: Election is "in Christ... without any foresight of faith or good works." - 3.6: God appoints the means: "redeemed by Christ, ... effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit." - 3.7: The rest are passed by and ordained "to dishonor and wrath for their sin." - 3.8: The doctrine is "to be handled with special prudence and care," yielding "humility, diligence, and abundant consolation."

Canons of Dort, First Main Point: Articles 1–5 put the burden of unbelief on humanity and give the credit for faith to God. Articles 7–11 define election as unconditional, in Christ, and unchangeable. Articles 12–14 teach that assurance comes from the fruits of election, and that the doctrine must be taught "in a godly and holy manner." Article 18 closes in doxology with Romans 11:33–36.

The 1689 Second London Baptist Confession, Chapter 3, follows Westminster almost word for word. On election itself, Baptist and Presbyterian Reformed confessions agree.

8. Closing Note

Romans 11:33 (LSB): "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!"

- **Humility.** Election leaves no room for boasting (1 Corinthians 1:29). Calvin and Dort both warn against prying into what God has not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29). Spurgeon called election "one of the most stripping doctrines in all the world."
- **Assurance.** Assurance comes "not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God," but from the fruits of election: faith in Christ, godly sorrow for sin, and hunger for righteousness (Dort I.12). "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" (Romans 8:33).
- **Evangelism.** The gospel is to be preached freely and earnestly to all (Dort II.5; Matthew 28:19). The preacher does not know who the elect are, and God has promised a people (Acts 18:10).

- **Doxology.** The purpose of election is "the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:6).

Soli Deo Gloria.

Notes on Sources and Method

- **Scripture:** all quotations are LSB, read on read.lsbible.org (Lockman Foundation) on 27 October 2026. Footnote and cross-reference markers have been removed, and small caps are rendered as normal text.
- **Reformers and confessions:** CCEL (Calvin, Luther, Westminster, Edwards), New Advent (Augustine), CRCNA (Dort, 2011 translation), Wikisource, Chapel Library and Evans/TCP (Whitefield), and the Spurgeon Library (Spurgeon).
- **Contemporary teachers:** learn.ligonier.org (Sproul), gty.org (MacArthur).
- **Translation note:** older English translations of Calvin, Luther, and Augustine are used because they are public domain. Wording differs among editions.