

What is Election?

Objectives are to discuss the following subtopics:

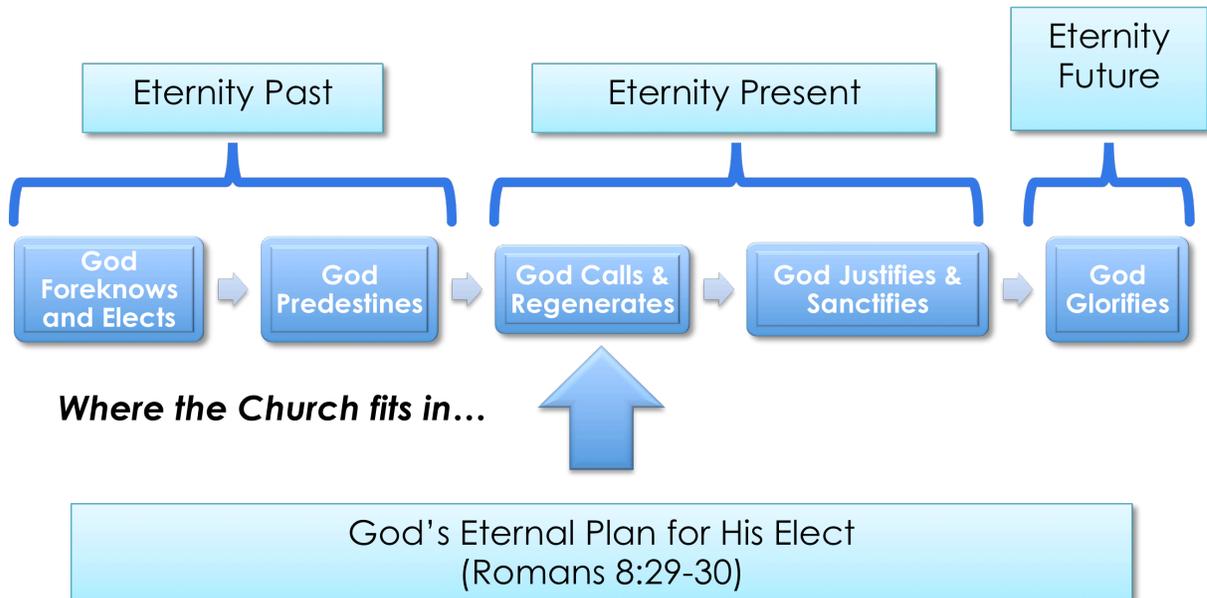
1. BFC Article 11 - Election
2. New Testament teachings on Election
3. What this means
4. What this doesn't mean
5. Objections & answers to Election
6. What is the basis of God's choosing?
7. The doctrine of reprobation
8. Practical application - Our response
9. Common grace

BFC Article 11 - Election

11-1 Election is a free act of the sovereign God in which from eternity, for reasons known only to Himself, and apart from any foreseen faith and/or goodness found in man, He graciously chose from among the fallen mankind a people unto salvation, that they might be conformed to Christ's image. Those so chosen He redeemed by His Son and seals by His Spirit.

New Testament Teachings On Election

- There are many passages in the New Testament that clearly confirm that God ordained beforehand those who would be saved, that is the elect.
 - **Acts 13:48** - *“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”*
 - **Romans 8:28-30** - *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might 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.”*
 - **Rom 9:11-13** - *“though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*
 - **Rom 11:7** - *“What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened...”*
 - **Ephesians 1:4-6** - *“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”*
- **Other Important Passages:** Matt 11:27, 22:14, 24:22, 24, 31, Lk 18:7, Rom 8:33, Col 3:12, Eph 1:12, 1Thes 1:4-5, 5:9, 2Thes 2:13, 2 Tim 1:9, Tit 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1-2, 2:8-9, Rev 13:7-8, 17:8)



What This Means: How does the New Testament present the teaching of Election?

- **As a Comfort.** The New Testament authors often present the doctrine of election as a comfort to believers. When Paul assures the Romans that “in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28), he gives God’s work of predestination as a reason why we can be assured of this truth.
 - **Distant past** - before the creation of the world, God foreknew and predestined his people to be conformed to the image of Christ
 - **Recent past** - God called and justified his people whom he had predestined
 - **Future** - when Christ returns, God has determined to give perfect, glorified bodies to those who believe in Christ
- **As a Reason Praise to God.** Paul says, “*He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace*” (Eph. 1:5-6). Similarly, he says, “*We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory*” (Eph. 1:12).
 - The doctrine of election does increase praise given to God for our salvation and seriously diminishes any pride that we might feel if we thought that our salvation was due to something good in us or something for which we should receive credit.
- **AS an Encouragement to Evangelism.** Paul says, “I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).
 - Election is Paul’s guarantee that there will be some success for his evangelism, for he knows that some of the people he speaks to will be the elect, and they will believe the gospel and be saved. It is as if someone invited us to come fishing and said, “I guarantee that you will catch some fish—they are hungry and waiting.”

What This Doesn't Mean: Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election:

- **Election Is Not Fatalistic or Mechanistic**
 - **Fatalism** - a system in which human choices and human decisions really do not make any difference. In other words, no matter what we do, things are going to turn out as they have been previously ordained, and the motivation for moral accountability is removed.
 - **Mechanism** - an impersonal universe in which all things that happen have been inflexibly determined by an impersonal force long ago, and the universe functions in a mechanical way so that human beings are more like machines or robots than genuine persons.
- **Election Is Not Based on God's Foreknowledge of Our Faith**
 - Foreknowledge of persons, not facts
 - Scripture never speaks of our faith as the reason God chose us (Rom 9:11-13, 16, 11:5-6, 1 Cor 1:26-29, 2 Tim 1:9)
 - Election based on something good in us (Our Faith) would be the beginning of salvation by merit (Eph 1:5-6, Phil 1:29)
 - Predestination based on foreknowledge still does not give people free choice
 - Conclusion: Election is unconditional. Faith & good works are the result, not the cause of God's choice. (Mark 13:20, Eph 1:4, 2 Thess 2:13, 2 Tim 1:9)

Objections & Answers to the Doctrine of Election

- **Objection 1:** Election means that we do not have a choice in whether we accept Christ or not.

Answer: While the Bible does teach election, it in no way negates human choice and volition. For example, Acts 13:48 - "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." While the basic thrust is divine election, this does not negate the presences of human volition in the context. The people were still required to "believe." The doctrine of election is fully able to accommodate the idea that we have a voluntary choice and we make willing decisions in accepting or rejecting Christ. Osborne said, "God is so wise and powerful that he ordains that we respond willingly." (Grant R. Osborne, 'Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts,' *Grace Unlimited*, pp 167-89)

- **Objection 2:** Election means that our choices are not real choices. If a choice is "caused by God" it may appear to us to be voluntary and willed by us, but it is nonetheless not a genuine or real choice because it is not absolutely free.

Answer: Why does a choice have to be absolutely free in order for it to be genuine or valid? Scripture does not teach that choices have to be free from God's influence and control in order to be genuine. If God makes us in a certain way and then tells us that our voluntary choices are real and genuine, then we must agree that they are.

- **Objection 3: Election makes us puppets or robots, not real persons.** If God really causes everything that we choose with regard to salvation, then we are no longer real persons.

Answer: God has created us and we must allow him to define what genuine personhood is. The analogy of a ‘puppet’ or a ‘robot’ reduces us to a sub-human category of things created by man. But genuine human beings are far greater than puppets or robots, because we do have a genuine will and we do make voluntary decisions based on our own preferences and want. This is what distinguishes us from the lower creation. We are real people created in God’s image and God has allowed us to make genuine choices that have real effects on our lives.

- **Objection 4: Election means that unbelievers never had a chance to believe.** If God had decreed from eternity that some people would not believe, then there was no genuine chance for them to believe and the entire system functions unfairly.

Answer 1: The Bible does not allow us to say that unbelievers had no chance to believe. When people rejected Jesus he always put the blame on their willful choice to reject him, not on anything decreed by God the Father. The consistent pattern in Scripture is that people who remain in unbelief do so because they are unwilling to come to God and the blame for such unbelief always lies with the unbelievers themselves, never with God.

Jn 8:43-44 - “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and ***your will is to do your father’s desires.***”

Matt 23:37 - “How often would I have gathered your children together....***and you would not!***”

Jn 5:24 - Jesus speaking to the Jews who rejected him, “***You refuse to come to me*** that you may have life.”

Rom 1:20 - Unbelievers are clearly “without excuse.”

- **Objection 5: Election is unfair.** Sometimes people regard the doctrine of election as unfair since it teaches that God chooses some to be saved and passes over others, deciding not to save them. How can this be fair? If God were going to save some people why doesn’t He save all of them?

Answer 1: First we must remember that it would be perfectly fair for God not to save anyone, just as he did with the angels: “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” (2 Peter 2:4) It would be fair for God to condemn all of sinful & rebellious humanity. But if he does save some at all, then this is a demonstration of grace (undeserved favor) that goes far beyond the requirements of fairness & justice.

Answer 2: Romans 9 must be studied in depth to answer this question. After saying that God “has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Romans 9:18), Paul then raises this precise objection: “You will say to me then, ‘Why does [God] still find fault? For who can resist His will?’” (v. 19) Paul anticipates the

question of “unfairness” to the doctrine of election. If God, not the person, determines each person’s ultimate destiny (even though everyone is still making willing choices, but God is behind all of those choices), then how can this be fair?

Paul’s response is not one that appeals to our pride, nor does he attempt to give a philosophical explanation of why this is just. He simply calls on God’s rights as the omnipotent Creator:

Romans 9:19-24 - “*On the contrary, who are you O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so 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.*”

There is a point when we simply cannot answer back to God or question His justice. He has done what he has done according to His sovereign will. He is the creator and we are the creatures and we ultimately have no basis from which to accuse him of unfairness or injustice.

What is the Basis of God’s choosing in election?

Ephesians 1 speaks to directly about God’s choosing:

- 1:4 - “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...***in love*** He predestined us...***according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.***”
- 1:7 - “we have redemption...***according to the riches of His grace***, which He lavished upon us...He made known to us the ***mystery of His will*** according to ***His kind intention.***”
- 1:11 - “...having been predestined ***according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will***, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.”

Also 2 Tim 1:9 - “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 granted us*** in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

Conclusion: God has chosen some to be saved according to the mystery of His will, which was full of love, kindness & full of grace!

- **Objection 6:** The Bible teaches that God wills to save everyone. The doctrine of election seems to contraction other passages in Scripture that say that God wills for all to be saved. Do not these passages contradict the idea that God has only chosen certain people to be saved?

1Tim 2:4 - Paul writes of God our Savior, “*who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*”

2 Peter 3:9 - Peter says, “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*” (2 Pet 3:9 ESV)

Answer:

- These verses speak of God’s revealed will (telling us what we should do), not his hidden will (his eternal plans for what will happen). The verses simply tell us that God invites and commands every person to repent and come to Christ for salvation, but they do not tell us anything about God’s secret decrees regarding who will be saved.
- “All people” (ESV) in 1 Timothy 2:4 refer to a subset of humanity (same subset as 2:1).
- “All” in 2 Peter 3:9 refers to the “you” or believers.
- It is clear that while God has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezek 33:11) and the heart of Jesus is one of compassion as He “wept” over unbelieving Jerusalem, and that the Apostle Paul had “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” in his heart over unbelieving Israel, that not everyone will be saved!

The Doctrine of Reprobation

- When we understand election as God’s sovereign choice of some persons to be saved, then there is necessarily another aspect of that choice, namely, God’s sovereign decision to pass over others and not to save them. This decision of God in eternity past is called **reprobation**.
 - **Reprobation** - the sovereign decision of God before creation to pass over some persons, in sorrow deciding not to save them, and to punish them for their sins, and thereby to manifest his justice.
 - **Reprobation** is something that we would not want to believe, and would not believe, unless Scripture clearly taught it.

Jude 1:4 - “*For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were **designated for this condemnation**, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*”

Rom 9:17-22 - “*For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills...What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,*”

Rom 11:7 - “*What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,*”

1 Peter 2:8 - “*they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*”

Matthew 11:25-26 - “Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father for such was your gracious will.’”

- There are important differences between election and reprobation as they are presented in the Bible...
 - God is viewed as actively choosing us for salvation, and doing so in love and with delight. But reprobation is viewed as something that brings God sorrow, not delight (Ez 33:11).
 - The cause of election lies in God, and the cause of reprobation lies in the sinner.
 - The ground of election is God’s grace, whereas the ground of reprobation is God’s justice. **Double predestination** is not a helpful or accurate phrase because it neglects these differences between election & reprobation.

“Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 33:11 ESV)

- If God genuinely feels sorrow at the punishment of the wicked, then why does he allow it or even decree that it will come about?
 - God knows that this will ultimately result in greater glory for himself.
 - It will show his power and wrath and justice and mercy in a way that could not otherwise be demonstrated.

Practical Application: Our Response to the Doctrine of Election

- We must realize that if we are Christians we have been saved because God in eternity past decided to set His love on us, not because of anything good in me, but simply because of the mystery of His will and the kind intention of His will & grace.
- If we are saved, we should have a great comfort that our salvation is secure. What God began in eternity past, He has promised to complete in eternity future. Since we have been predestined, God promises not only to justify us, but also to glorify us. (Phil 1:6, Rom 8:29)
- We ought to be the most humble people in the universe because we have no claim on God’s grace whatsoever. Our salvation was totally God gracious doing!
- We ought to be the most worshipful people in the universe giving praise and glory to God. (Rom 11:33-36)
- We ought to evangelize others with the hope that God has many others who are His elect. This should remove all pressure to “produce results” since we know that salvation is God’s doing. Evangelism is the fruit of obedience & a work of faithfulness on every believer’s part (2 Cor 5:18-21, Matt 28:19-20). Our ministry should be done in light of God’s sovereign grace knowing that God is the sovereign one who “gives the increase.” (1 Cor 3:6-9, Matt 16:18)

- As a Church, our ministry does not have to stoop to gimmicks to build our ministry. Our goal should be simply to be faithful in preaching the Word of God, worshipping God in truth & in spirit, building up the saints, and compelling all men to repent.
- We should make our own election sure by being diligent to practice faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, & love proving that we have been washed and purified from our former sins. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

Common Grace

Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives *all human beings* innumerable blessings in this life that are not a part of salvation.

- **Physical.** Those who believe in Jesus and those who reject His claim still receive the abundance of the earth. (Mt 5:44-45, Acts 14:16-17, Gen 39:5, Ps 145:9, 15-16)

“so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matt 5:45 ESV)

- **Moral.** People are not as evil as they could be. (Rom 1:32, Luke 6:33)
- **Creative.** We can both produce and appreciate many kinds of good and beautiful things.
- **Intellectual.** Even those who reject God have made many incredible discoveries and inventions. (Jn 1:9, Acts 17:22-23)
- **Societal.** Many communities, institutions, and governments provide and protect its members. (Rom 13:1)
- **Religious.** We are told to pray for our persecutors, allowing them to benefit from God’s answer for them.

Common grace does not save anyone, but it is:

- 1) used by God to prepare those who will be redeemed (2 Peter 3:9-10),
- 2) to demonstrate God’s goodness & mercy to undeserving sinners (Ps 145:9),
- 3) to demonstrate God’s justice in condemning sinners who refuse to believe (Rom 2:5, 3:19),
- 4) to demonstrate God’s ultimate glory.

Questions for Review and Application

1. Does the doctrine of election give you any comfort or assurance about your future?
2. After reading this chapter, do you honestly feel that you would like to give thanks or praise to God for choosing you to be saved? Do you sense any unfairness in the fact that God did not decide to save everyone?

3. What effect do you think this chapter will have on your motivation for evangelism? Is this a positive or negative effect? Can you think of ways in which the doctrine of election can be used as a positive encouragement to evangelism (see 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:10)?