

Understanding Systematic Theology
“Christology – Election and Atonement”

I. How do we relate election and atonement?

French Confession, 12; *Scots Confession*, 8; *Belgic Confession*, 16; *Heidelberg Catechism*, 54; *39 Articles*, 17; *II Helvetic Confession*, 1; *Irish Articles*, 32:33; *WCF*, 3; *LC Q.*12,13,30-32; *SC Q.* 20-21

A. The Definition of Election: WCF 3:3-7

3) By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

4) These angels and men, thus predestined and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

5) 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 mere free grace and love, 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.

6) As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only,

7) The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extended or withheld mercy as He pleased, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.”

B. Biblical Terms for Election: (See *TDNT*, *NIDOTTE*, *TWOT*, ad loc.)

1. *Bachar* - “choose, elect, decide for” (198x’s)

a. Deuteronomy 7:6-7

“⁶ For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.”

b. Deuteronomy 4:37

“³⁷ Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power.”

c. Psalm 135:4

“⁴ For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel for His own possession.”

d. Psalm 78:68

“⁶⁸ But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.”

e. I Kings 8:16

“¹⁶ Since the day that I brought My people Israel from Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel {in which} to build a house that My name might be there, but I chose David to be over My people Israel.”

e. I Chronicles 28:5

“⁵ And of all my sons (for the LORD has given me many sons), He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.”

f. I Samuel 10:24

“²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, ‘Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people.’ So all the people shouted and said, ‘{Long} live the king!’”

2. *Ekleptomai* - “Pick for oneself, choose” (22x’s)

a. Ephesians 1:4

“⁴ Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love...”

3. *Eklektos* - “elected, chosen” (22x’s)

a. I Peter 1:1

“¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.”

b. I Peter 2:4

“⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God.”

c. I Peter 6:6,9

“⁶ For {this} is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner {stone} and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.’”

“⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for {God’s} own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

4. *Ekleoya* - “election, choosing” (7x’s)

a. Romans 9:11

“¹¹ For though {the twins} were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to {His} choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls.”

b. Romans 11:5,7,28

“⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to {God’s} gracious choice.”

“⁷ What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened.”

“²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of {God’s} choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.”

c. I Thessalonians 1:4

“⁴ Knowing, brethren beloved by God, {His} choice of you.”

5. *Airo* - “take, choose”

a. II Thessalonians 2:13

“¹³ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

6. *Tasso* - “appoint, ordain

a. Acts 13:48

“⁴⁸ 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.”

7. *Proginosko* - “foreknow” (5x’s)

a. Romans 8:29

“²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

b. Romans 11:2

“² God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in {the passage about} Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?”

8. *Prognosis* - “foreknowledge” (2x’s)

a. Acts 2:23

“²³ This {Man} delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put {Him} to death.”

b. 1 Peter 1:1-2

“¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

9. *Prorizo* - “decide upon beforehand, predestine” (6x’s of God’s decree)

a. Romans 8:29-30

“²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

b. I Corinthians 2:7

⁷ But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden {wisdom,} which God predestined before the ages to our glory."

c. Ephesians 1:5,11

⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will."

¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."

10. *Prithemi* - "plan, purpose, propose" (3x's)

a. Romans 1:13

¹³ And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles."

b. Romans 3:25

²⁵ Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed."

c. Ephesians 1:9

⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him."

11. *Proetomazo* - "prepare before"

a. Romans 9:23

²³ 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."

b. Ephesians 2:10

“¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

C. The Objects of God’s Electing Purpose

1. Christ

a. I Peter 1:20

“²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.”

b. I Peter 2:6

“⁶ For {this} is contained in Scripture: ‘Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner {stone} and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.’”

2. Angels

a. I Timothy 5:21

“²¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of {His} chosen angels, to maintain these {principles} without bias, doing nothing in a {spirit of} partiality.”

3. Israel, the Nation

a. Deuteronomy 7:7

“⁷ The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.”

b. Isaiah 45:4

“⁴ For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen {one,} I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known me.”

4. Individuals for Service

a. I Samuel 16:7-12

“⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God {sees} not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’ ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, ‘Neither has the LORD chosen this one.’ ⁹ Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the LORD chosen this one.’ ¹⁰ Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The LORD has not chosen these.’ ¹¹ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are these all the children?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.’ Then Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ ¹² So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is he.’”

b. Acts 9:15

“¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.’”

5. Believers

a. Ephesians 1:4-5

“⁴ Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.”

b. Romans 8:29-30

“²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many

brethren;³⁰ and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

D. Proof of the Doctrine

1. The proof is found, first of all, in the verses noted in Sections B and C.
2. The proof for election is implied by other passages that speak to the sovereign God-directed nature of salvation.
 - a. Matthew 1:21 - Jesus will “save His people from their sins.”
 - b. John 17:2 - The Father will “give eternal life to those you have given Him (Jesus).”
 - c. John 10:27 - Jesus affirmed that “My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow Me.”
 - d. II Timothy 2:19 - Paul asserts that “The Lord knows those who are His.”
3. Election is a necessary consequence of God’s sovereignty. Ephesians 1:11 states that Christians are “foreordained according to the purpose ... of His will.”
4. Election is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of total depravity. If a man is incapable of coming to God, or doing anything to initiate the redemptive process, it is a reasonable corollary that except God begin the process it will have no fruition. This beginning of the process is called “election.”

E. The Basis of Election

1. Election is not based on the human will.
 - a. The new birth is not dependent on human will.
 1. John 1:13
“¹³ Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

b. God's showing of mercy does not depend "on the man who wills or the man who runs."

1. Romans 9:16

"¹⁶ So then it {does} not {depend} on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

c. The working out of salvation is dependent on God who works in us "to will and to do."

1. Philippians 2:13-13

"¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure."

2. Election is not based on human works. - Romans 9:11,16; 11:5-6; II Timothy 1:9; and especially I Peter 1:12.

3. election is according to God's own good pleasure and grace. - Ephesians 1:5,11, 2:7; Romans 11:5-6; II Timothy 1:9.

F. Election and Foreknowledge (Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 1,415ff)

1. Knowledge, to know, often means intimate personal relationship; Genesis 4:1;

Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2; Matthew 1;25; 7:23; I Corinthians 8:3; Galatians 4:9; II Timothy 2:19.

2. Foreknowledge is more than merely "knowing beforehand"; Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29, 11:2; I Peter 1:2, 19-20. "The meaning of the words *proginoskein* and *prognosis* in the New Testament is not determined by their usage in the classics, but by the special meaning of *yada* (Hebrew for "to know in a relational sense. Part of Yahweh.) They do not denote simple intellectual foresight or prescience, the mere taking knowledge of something beforehand, but rather a selective

knowledge which regards one with favor and makes one an object of love, and thus approaches the idea of foreordination.” Berkhof, *ST*, p.112. See also Kittel, *TDNT*, I, p.715.

- a. In Acts 2:23, “...by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge...”
- b. In Romans 8:29, “...the foreknowledge of God,” which Paul mentions, is not a bare prescience, as some unwise persons absurdly imagine, but the adoption by which He had always distinguished His children from the reprobate.” Calvin, *Commentaries*, ad loc.
- c. In I Peter 1:1-2, “Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit unto obedience “and the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.”

G. Election and Reprobation

1. There is not a symmetry between election and reprobation. Although the decree to elect and to pass by (reprobation) is based on the sovereign action of God, these two activities are not symmetrical.
 - a. Election occurs regardless of any merit on the part of those who are elected. It is unconditional, unmeritorious, and irrespective of any personal merit or demerit.
 - *Being good cannot earn God’s election.
 - *Being bad does not forfeit or hinder God’s election. Indeed, all are regarded as sinful (Romans 11:32) and the entire human race constitutes a *massa damnata* (Romans 9:21 - the same lump).
 - b. Reprobation occurs as a result of a sovereign choice; however, those who are reprobated are not rendered any worse off by God’s actions.
 - *Both those who are elected and those who are reprobated are viewed as sinful and fallen (an Infralapsarian assumption).

*Those who are reprobated are not made more sinful by God’s passing them by. Instead, they are abandoned, apart from common grace, to the end they have chosen and the destruction towards which their sinful nature already tends.

2. Thus, God’s sovereign choice discriminates between the elect and the reprobate.
 - a. God’s actions cause the transformation in the elect, so that all may be attributed to God’s gracious activity.
 - b. Man’s own sinful disposition and opposition to God is the basis of his judicial condemnation and, while not remedied by God’s action, neither is it exacerbated by anything that God does.

Note the differences:

	God’s Action	Man’s Sinful Nature
The Elect	The Source and Ground of Election unto Life	Contributes nothing to God’s gracious activity
The Reprobate	Contributes nothing to man’s sinful condition	The Source and Ground of Reprobation unto Death

3. Finally, Election is the manifestation of God’s grace, reprobation the outworking of God’s justice.

H. The Purpose of Election

1. Election is unto redemption in Christ: Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4, 2:10
2. Ultimately, the glory of God is the ultimate end of election: Ephesians 1:11,12, the “praise of his glory”; I Peter 2:9, “proclaim His excellencies.”

I. Misunderstandings of Election (per Grudem, *ST*, p.674ff)

1. Some mistakenly conclude that election is Fatalism.
 - a. John Wesley, Works, L,234 (“Predestination Calmly Considered,” 52)

“A mere machine is not capable of being either acquitted or condemned. Justice cannot punish a stone for falling to the ground; nor on your scheme, a man for falling into sin. For he can no more help it than the stone.” (See also page 224 in above work, “PCC”37)

b. Jack Cottrell, “Conditional Election” in Pinnock, *Grace Unlimited*, 56

“A major part of Christendom has never been able to accept the concept of the unconditional election of individuals as biblical. They declare that Scripture just does not teach such an idea, which appears to be unjust and arbitrary on God’s part and seems to lead to pessimism and quietism on man’s part.”

2. Election is based on God’s foreknowledge of those who will believe.

a. James Arminius, *Works*, II,65

“I say election is prior to Faith, as being that by which Faith is appointed as the means of obtaining salvation. But if it signifies ‘the Decree by which God determines to bestow salvation on some on,’ then Faith foreseen is prior to election. For as believers alone are saved, so only believers are predestined to salvation. But the Scriptures know no election, by which God precisely and absolutely has determined to save any one without having first considered him as a believer.”

b. John Wesley, *Works*, X,210 (PCC,” 17)

“In like manner, God calleth true believers, ‘elect from the foundation of the world;’ although they were not actually elect, or believers, till many ages after, in their several generations. Then only it was that they were actually elected when they were made the ‘sons of God by faith.’”

J. Objections to the Doctrine of Election (these were expressed in Cottrell’s, *Election*, 51ff; see responses from a Calvinistic perspective in Grudem, *ST*, 680ff.)

1. Election violates my free choice to accept or reject Christ.
 - a. I am not a robot!
 - b. What about my free will?
 - c. The Devil votes against you. God votes for you - you cast the deciding vote?
 - d. But, apart from the regenerating work of God, you will always vote the wrong way! (See Romans 1:18-25; 3:10-18)

2. Election is unfair.
 - a. This stacks the deck! But isn't that the whole point of grace? It isn't fair or just!
 - b. God only expects of me what I am able to give him. But, cf. Ezekiel 37:1-4. Were the bones capable of doing what God required?

3. God want to save everyone.
 - a. God loves everybody! But, cf Luke 22:31 with John 13:27.
 - b. God is not respecter of person! Indeed - Romans 3:10, 3:23

4. Election removes any reason for evangelizing.

“Why bother if the elect will be saved anyway? But if this is so (i.e. Calvinistic doctrines), then is all preaching vain? It is needless to them that are elected; for they, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be saved. Therefore, the end of preaching to save souls - is void with regard to them; and it is useless to them that are not elected, for they cannot possible be saved. They, whether with preaching or without, will infallibly be damned.” Wesley, *Works*, III, 376

SO- GOD ORDAINS ENDS WITHOUT NECESSARY MEANS? DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?

5. Election means the free offer of the Gospel cannot be sincere.
 - a. “His ministers indeed, as they know not the event of things may be sincere in offering salvation to all persons, according to their general commission,

‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ But how can God or Christ be sincere in sending them with this commission, to offer His grace to all men, if God has not provided such grace for all men, no, not so much as conditionally.” Wesley, *Works*, X226 (“PCC,” 40)

- b. But, for the Calvinist response on the sincere offer of the Gospel to all, see R.L. Dabney, *Discussions*, I,282ff, “God’s Indiscriminate Mercy.” Do you always do those things you desire?

K. Food for Thought

1. Wesley on Predestination:

“It is to represent the most high God (he that hath ears to hear let him hear!) as more cruel, false, and unjust than the devil! This is blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust.” Wesley, *Works*, III,383

2. Calvin on Predestination

“In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God’s judgment is made known. For there is no doubt that this variety also serves the decision of God’s eternal election . . . We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know His eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: That He does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what He denies to others.” Calvin, *ICR*, III, xx1,1

L. Atonement and the Order of Decrees (see Warfield, *Plan of Salvation*, 87ff)

1. The Supralapsarian View (Beza, Pink), God decreed:

- a. To predestine some to life, others to death.
- b. To create mankind.
- c. To ordain the fall (*lapsus*).
- d. To redeem the elect (thus, the atonement is purposeful and intended for the elect alone).

2. The Infralapsarian View (or sublapsarian; most Calvinists). God decreed:

- a. To create mankind.
- b. To ordain the fall.
- c. To elect some to eternal life, to pass by others.
- d. To redeem the elect (thus, the atonement is purposeful and intended for the elect alone.)

3. The Arminian View (Arminius, *Works*, II, 719). God decreed:

- a. To appoint Christ as Redeemer.
- b. To receive into favor those who believe and persevere.
- c. To render all means necessary for faith and repentance.
- d. To save those whom God foreknows will believe.