

SAVING THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

1 Peter – Week 1

1 Peter 1:1-2

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August 9, 2017

The title of this sermon is “Saving the Doctrine of Election.”

Today we’re beginning a new series through the book of 1 Peter.

1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter,

one of the original twelve apostles of Jesus.

After Jesus died Peter became the leader of the apostles.

He was the preacher on the day of Pentecost.

And he’s the main character in the first half of the book of Acts until the story of Paul picks.

He’s mentioned in the New Testament more than any other apostle,
including the apostle Paul.

1 Peter was written from the city of Babylon, which was a small city on the Euphrates river.

And it was written originally to all the Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were different places in modern-day Turkey that were a part of the Roman Empire.

And Peter begins this letter with the topic of election, one of the most hotly debated doctrines in Christian theology.

What is election? Let me set it up like this.

The Bible says that God decided in advance, or elected, or predestined, or foreordained, before the foundation of the world, who will be saved and who will not be saved.

We see this in Scriptures like **Ephesians 1:4-5 (CSB)**. “4 For he chose (*eklego*, 1586, verb) us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. 5 He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

But the Bible also says that the way to salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.

We see this in verses like **John 3:16 (CSB)**. “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

So the Bible presents two truths that seem to contradict.

On the one hand, God decides in advance who will be saved.

On other hand, God saves those who decide to have faith in Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, salvation is by election.

On the other hand, salvation is by faith.

Question: How is a person saved?

Is it completely based on God’s election?

Is it based on our faith?

Is it a combination of both?

That's where **1 Peter 1:1-2** is very helpful, because it brings an important word to the discussion of election, and that word is "foreknowledge." Let's read.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen
2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Notice that Peter is writing to "those chosen."

That's the Greek word *eklektos*, which can be translated "elect," or "chosen ones."

This passage refers to Christians as the elect; those that have been chosen for salvation.

And then it says that we are chosen for two things.

First, we are chosen to be obedient.

God saves us not merely from the punishment of sin, but from sinful living to a life of obedience.

And notice that this is made possible "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit."

The word "sanctify" means to set apart, or to consecrate.

Sanctification is a big word that means spiritual growth.

When God saves us, the Holy Spirit begins the lifelong process of growing us more and more like Christ.

So the Holy Spirit is the only who enables and empowers us to become more and more obedient to Christ.

We are chosen to be obedient to God – to live lives of obedience to God.

And **second**, we are chosen or elected “to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.”

That is referring to our forgiveness.

When we put our faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ for our sins, God forgives us and justifies us so that we are no longer under wrath, but are adopted into God’s family and inherit eternal life.

Ephesians 1:7 (CSB) says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.”

So being sprinkled by the blood of Christ refers to our forgiveness through faith in the death of Christ.

So 1 Peter 1:1-2 says that we have been chosen, or elected, or predestined for two things:

Obedience to God through sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit;
and forgiveness of our sins by being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

But put verses 1 and 2 together. “Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

What is the foreknowledge of God?

It is **God’s knowledge of everything that will happen in the future.**

So God's election, or God's choice of who will be saved and who will not be saved is based on His knowledge of the future, or His foreknowledge.

In other words, there is something that God knows about the future that influences His decision to elect, or choose, or decide in advance who will be saved and who will not be saved.

What could God know about the future that would cause Him to choose some to be saved, and some to not be saved?

There's only one possible answer. Faith.

The Bible repeatedly says that the only thing that distinguishes those who are saved and those who are not saved is faith in Jesus Christ.

Those who repent and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are saved.

Those who reject Christ are not saved.

John 3:18 (CSB) says, "Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God."

Therefore we could define the doctrine of election like this:

God decided before the foundation of the world to save those individuals who He foreknew would believe in Jesus.

So now let's take those two seemingly contradictory statements and see how the word "foreknowledge" helps us to put them together.

On the one hand, God decides in advance, or elects, or predestines, or foreordains which individuals will be saved and which will not.

On the other hand, salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, salvation is by election.

On the other hand, salvation is by faith.

How do these two truths fit together. How is it possible for God to choose in advance who will be saved if salvation is dependent on an individual putting his personal faith in Jesus Christ?

Foreknowledge.

God based His election on His foreknowledge of who would believe in Jesus Christ.

God decided who will be saved in advance. His decision was based on His foreknowledge of who would believe in Him.

Foreknowledge explains the connection between salvation by election, and salvation by faith.

This is the traditional Arminian view of the doctrine of election.

Arminianism is named after Jacob Arminius, a 16th century Dutch theologian who popularized this view of election.

I consider myself an Arminian in my soteriology.

And this understanding of election saves the doctrine of election.

From what? From Calvinism. From the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election.

Calvinists have taken the doctrine of election and interpreted it in a way that is both unbiblical, illogical, and dishonoring to God's reputation. Let me explain.

There are two views of the doctrine of election.

2 Views of Election

1. Unconditional Election.

Popularized by the French theologian John Calvin, it is the view that God, from eternity, chose some for salvation and some condemnation, and this is not based on anything in the person – neither performance, nor free will, nor faith.

It is not conditioned on anything the individual does.

There is nothing different between the elect and the non-elect. God simply chose some sinners for salvation, and some for damnation.

As I said, this view of election is both unbiblical and it dishonors God, even though it is widely held by Christians today – usually Christians who call themselves Reformed, Calvinists, and most Presbyterians. There are several problems with unconditional election.

The Problems With Unconditional Election

First, how can God love everyone if He can save everyone but chooses not to?

What does John 3:16 (CSB) tell us? “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Who does God love? The whole world. Not just the elect.

Some Calvinists would say that this means that God loves everyone of the elect in the whole world. But that’s not what it says. He loves everyone in the world.

Now most Calvinists would say that yes, God loves everyone in the world. And if God wanted to, He could choose to save everyone.

At the same time, they believe that God did not choose to save everyone.

When it comes to the non-elect, God never intended to save them; and He never gives them the opportunity to be saved.

But that brings up a problem.

How can you say that God loves the non-elect if He could save them, but He chooses not to?

He loves them, but He never intended to save them, and never gives them the opportunity to be saved.

That's like seeing a person drowning, having the ability to save Him, but choosing not to. That's not love.

Second, how is it possible that God desires to save everyone if He can but chooses not to?

2 Peter 3:9 (CSB) says, “The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.”

This verse clearly says that God does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Again, Some Calvinists would say that it means that God does not want any of the *elect* to perish; but that's not what it says. God does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance. Let's look at another verse.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (CSB) says, “3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Again, this verse says that God wants everyone to be saved. Everyone. Not just every one of the elect, but everyone in the world.

Now some Calvinists affirm that God desires to save everyone, even the non-elect.

And they believe that God could choose to save the non-elect if He wanted to.

At the same time, they believe that God never intended to save the non-elect, and never gives them the chance to be saved.

But again, that's a problem.

How is it possible for God to want to save the non-elect, and be able to save the non-elect, but at the same time He does not choose to save the non-elect;

He never planned to save them; and He does not give them a chance to be saved?

That's like saying that I desire to help you fix your car, and I have the ability to help you fix your car, but then not helping you fix your car. That doesn't make sense.

Third, why is the invitation to believe for salvation extended to the non-elect if God does not choose to save them?

Let's go back to **John 3:16 (CSB)**. "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

On the one hand we already saw in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 that God wants to save everyone in the world.

And then here in John 3:16 Jesus clearly extends an invitation to “everyone” to believe and be saved.

We see this also in **Romans 10:13**. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Now there’s no way to deny these verses. Calvinists have to agree that God extends the offer of salvation to everyone. It’s right here in scripture.

So Calvinists would say that God offers salvation to the non-elect,

and He could save them if He wanted to,

but He does not choose to save them; He never intended to save them; and He doesn’t actually make it possible for them to believe and be saved.

Now that just doesn’t make sense to me. Why does God invite the non-elect to believe and be saved, if at the same time He has already chosen not to save them, and not to give them an opportunity to be saved?

That's like me deciding in advance that you will not be allowed to attend my birthday party, but then I still invite you. Something's not right with this picture.

Let me give you an analogy that used with my kids to help you understand the problem with Calvinism. I used this analogy with my kids one evening in Bible Time. We were sitting down on bedroom floor and I said, “Let’s say that that all six of you go to the back field and pop fireworks and it sets the field on fire and ends up burning down a house. All six of you are guilty and deserve punishment. But in order to display my love, I decide to choose three of you and forgive you. But in order to display my justice and wrath I decide to punish the other three. Would that be just? Would that be fair. Again, it would be just to punish all, because all are equally guilty; but it would not be loving and just to forgive three and punish three when I could forgive all six.

So these are some of the main problems with the Calvinist understanding of election, or what they call unconditional election. And it is very popular today. But it is unbiblical, and it dishonors God.

2. Conditional Election.

The second view of election is the one that I started out with this morning. **God decided before the foundation of the world to save those individuals who He foreknew would believe in Jesus.**

This is the Arminian view of election, and it is called conditional election for two reasons.

First, it is called election because it affirms that God decides in advance, before the foundation of the world, who will be saved and who will not be saved.

You can't be a Biblical Christian without having some kind of view of election.

Arminians do not deny election.

Second, it is called conditional election because there is a reason that God chose some for salvation, and not others.

The elect have met a condition – faith in Jesus Christ.

That is not the same as doing a good deed for salvation. The Bible is clear that faith and works are not the same.

Faith in Jesus Christ is confessing that your good deeds cannot get you into heaven, but only atoning sacrifice of Christ.

So God looked into the future and saw who would believe in Jesus, and He elected them to salvation.

Does God love everyone and want to save everyone? Yes. **1 Timothy 2:3-4 (CSB)** says, “3 This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Then why doesn't God elect everyone to salvation? Because salvation is by faith in Christ. You must believe in Jesus to be saved. **Ephesians 2:8 (CSB)** says, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift.”

Does that mean that God does not choose in advance who will be saved? No. God predestines some to salvation, but His predestination is according to His foreknowledge of who will believe in Jesus.

1 Peter 1:1-2 (CSB) says, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

Romans 8:29-30 (CSB) says it as well. “29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.”