

Christ's Election

It was grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved...
This grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home...

John Newton, *Amazing Grace*

Grace is not merely the *offer* of salvation, as a weak, insipid grace. Grace is much more. The grace of God *turns our heart* towards God. This is where the power of the gospel lies. This is worth shouting from the housetops. There is no better news. If it was not grace alone that turned our heart, then it would be ourselves and this would be our own righteousness, which is contrary to the gospel message.

In this chapter we look at the biblical teachings of the election and preservation of God's people. There is a tension between what we consider to be fair and the nature of true justification. The only basis by which any man can be justified is that God justifies him freely. This is due to two facts:

1. No man deserves it.
2. Since God is just, no other creature can object to what He does.

Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. (Rom 8:33).

The difficulty of understanding or accepting the meaning of election has been approached in different ways. One view is that God elects those whom He saves, on no other basis than His own free choice. Another view is that God elects those whom He knows in advance will choose Him by accepting the gospel. This means that God elects those who first elect Him.

Another view is similar, which is called *group election*. This means that God elects all those *in Christ*. He elects *the group*. It is held that whether we enter into Christ by believing is up to us. That is, we are not elected as individuals. This view can be depicted by a bus that is predetermined to travel to a certain city. Any person who enters that bus by their own choice is predestined to go to that city, because that is where the bus is going.

Another view is *universalism*. This holds that all people will be saved and that there is not an election of only some people to salvation. It is an extreme position of Arminianism. Arminianism holds that it is unfair for God to elect only some people, so it makes man the one who chooses or elects. Universalism goes a step further and says that it is unfair for God to condemn any person for any reason and therefore all will be saved.

Topics in this chapter include:

- Election in the Old Testament.
- What election does not mean.
- What election does mean.
- Foreknowledge.
- Eternal covenant.
- Preservation.

Two steps in discussing election are:

1. Find out whether election is a biblical doctrine – does the Bible teach it?
2. Find out the biblical meaning of the doctrine of election – what does the Bible mean by this doctrine?

We must not add a third step: *what we think of what the Bible says*. We limit ourselves to the definitions that the Bible gives. Some people say, “That means we do not think.” No, it means that we think biblically. God knows better than us.

The study of biblical election is not carried out for speculative reasons, but because:

1. It is in the scripture. It is not a major point in our ministry, but it is in scripture and therefore should not be ignored.
2. It can help deal with pride. We give God 100% glory for our salvation and ourselves none. The Bible proclaims the sovereignty of God. Salvation is 100% grace, not 95% grace and 5% of us.
3. It gives us a Christ centeredness that allows us to relate to all other doctrines, philosophy and culture with a biblical perspective. It maintains the doctrine of *sola scriptura*.
4. It allows us to build our Christian life on the right foundation, His rest and finished work and not on ourselves. It accepts the *total depravity* of man.
5. It encourages believers to walk in love, because pride is dealt with and because the unconditional love of God is seen in its fullness, as opposed to a worldly conditional love.
6. It encourages evangelism because the riches of Christ are so magnified that the heart catches fire.
7. It encourages new birth rather than evangelism based on human need. This helps prevent *inch-deep Christianity*.
8. It encourages faith and action because we know that God is at work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13).
9. It encourages faithfulness and service because we see that the Father has a positive plan and that all works together for good in Him. It gives us great hope.
10. It enables us to see the world in God’s general grace and not to condemn everything that is not Christian.

This does not mean that those who believe in election will exhibit these qualities and those who do not believe in election will not. It is still down to personal choice and character and this is not a matter of the doctrine that one holds, but of our openness to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not true to say that if you do not believe in this doctrine that you will not be a good Christian. We are saying that this truth exalts God and gives us a proper perspective on man.

The Old Testament

Just flicking through any Bible concordance will show us that election is spoken of throughout the scripture. Is 51:2-3 tells those who seek righteousness to look to Abraham, who was called when he

was alone. Abraham had nothing to recommend himself. Paul explained (Rom 4:10) that he was called when in uncircumcision, meaning that his election was of grace and not because of his works.

This is further expanded in Ezekiel 16 where Israel's election is described: "Your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite...your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water." (vs. 3-4). The point again is that Abraham had nothing to commend himself to God. He was chosen merely because that was God's choice. Israel prided themselves in racial purity, despising the Hittites and Amorites. God reminds them that they are from the same ancestors. There was absolutely no difference between them.

Israel

Concerning Israel, Moses said, "The Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people to Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth." (Deut 14:2). Their holiness was to be a *response* to God choosing them out of the nations, not in order to obtain that election.

We see that God's love was not due to anything that was in Israel. And the election was particular to Israel, for the same election was not given to other nations at that time. God eventually rejected national Israel because of their sin, but He kept a remnant in Abraham's seed according to promise. His election was never thwarted.

The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn to your fathers, has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut 7:7-8).

Speak not in your heart...For my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land...Not for your righteousness, or for the uprightness of your heart...for you are a stiffnecked people. (Deut 9:4-6).

We can see here that God called Israel and Abraham on the basis only of His free choice. There was nothing particular about them that qualified them in any way.

His Servants

Consistently throughout the Old Testament God chooses and this choice is related to God's mercy and sovereignty and not to man's goodness. He chooses a seed through the line of Seth and a nation. Israel was constantly told not to ascribe being chosen to any goodness in them. This would apply to any of God's children today also.

Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance. (Ps 33:12).

God chose 7,000 who did not bow the knee to Baal; "Yet have I left Me 7,000 in Israel..." (1 Kings 19:18). God is clear that it was He who kept the hearts of these true prophets. When all the earth was corrupted Noah found "grace" (undeserved favour) in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8). God preserved Israel the same way:

Except the Lord of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom...(Is 1:9).

Isaiah describes His preordination of Christ and the election of the redeemed Israel, the church:

Behold I and the children the Lord has given Me...(Is 8:18, Heb 2:13).

This is spoken to Jesus. His household is made up of the children that the Father calls by Himself and gives to Christ. Not even Jesus chooses them.

Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect. (Is 42:1).

And I will bring forth a Seed out of Jacob and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains: and Mine elect shall inherit it and My servants shall dwell there. (Is 65:9).

He called Cyrus king of Persia before he was born:

Thus says the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held...I the Lord call you by name. (Is 45:1-3).

Moses did not choose God, but God called Moses against Moses' own will. He had no choice (Exodus 3). Calling to ministry in the Old Testament was not something for which people aspired. God chose out His servants entirely by His own choice. All the prophets were called this way.

Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you and I ordained you a prophet to the nations. (Jer 1:5).

This theme is continued in the New Testament in relation to the church. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you...Which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God..." (1 Pet 2:9-10).

Blessed is the man whom You choose and cause to approach to You, that he may dwell in Your courts. (Ps 65:4).

We see here that God chooses us and He moves on our heart to cause us to seek Him. There is no doubt that this concept of election was held by the Old Testament prophets. They also spoke of responsibility, which we are required to have, but saw any glory we had in it entirely due to His grace. The Old Testament prophets did not uphold our responsibility without also ascribing complete glory and sovereignty to God. They spoke of both. We must undermine neither.

What Election Does not Mean

Before we look further on a biblical description of election it is good to clarify what election is not. There are three main complaints against the term *election*. These are:

1. It is un-evangelical.
2. It promotes irresponsibility.
3. It betrays the just nature of God.

Firstly, it is most evangelical. There is nothing more wonderful to preach and easy for God's children to receive than the unconditional love of God in Christ. A *gospel* that depends on works hinders real faith.

Secondly, His grace makes us responsible, or His power and faith are not in us.

Thirdly, we must not judge God's nature or ways. Our humanistic values and limited insight is a very poor judge of God's eternal plan in Christ. It is another form of pride.

Election does not mean that we do not preach the gospel to all people. Our heart, full of the power and love of God, calls out to every individual without exception. Our commission is to preach the

gospel to every person. When Jesus lives in us, we are part of evangelism to all people. If we hold the doctrines of election in self-satisfaction we have missed faith. That is not the nature of Jesus.

Abraham was chosen to be a blessing (Gen 22:18). God chooses people to use them to reach all mankind. He chose Israel to make them a testimony of His love in the earth. He chose us to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person." (Matt 28:19). We should not only preach to all, but compel all, by all means, to obey the gospel. We take no pleasure in any that perish (Ezek 18:32).

The urgency of evangelism and mission to all people of all backgrounds is the mark of every believer in Christ. It is God's heartbeat. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. If we do not have this heart we are dead and do not have the love of God. Self-satisfaction is a disease of the heart. God's people have love and zeal for every individual they meet.

It does not mean that the doctrine is more important than love. We are to love one another fervently, not mark those out who do not fully accept our doctrine. Christianity is about the person of Christ in us, not the doctrine we hold to. It is about the love of God. We should not be so insecure that we treat people differently because they do or do not accept what we teach. Win people with love.

It does not mean that we do not have a strong compassion and care for all people, especially for the household of faith. Some forms of Calvinism are uncaring religion, which is evidence of spiritual death.

This includes believing that anyone who does not behave like us is not saved. This is cold self-righteousness that sees faults in others, but not in ourselves. We can preach grace and show the least grace towards others. God cares for people and He loves the individual.

Jesus did not die for an exclusive club. He died for the world, meaning for all nations in all generations, whether they are like us or not. We do not ram our doctrines down people's throats in arrogance, but speak the truth with boldness and clarity, correcting ideas and trusting God's love to transform.

We do not cut off grace from any person, nor behave in a sectarian way, since God in Christ did not cut off grace from us.

It does not mean that only a few will be saved. It is presumption to look at God's election negatively. "You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation...And I beheld and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands." (Rev 5:9, 11).

In Revelation the 144,000 represents completeness. The 12 tribes of Israel, times 12, times 1,000 represents the complete fellowship of the redeemed. It is not a literal number. It means many and none missing. People often see God's sovereignty in a negative way, rather than the *much more* positive aspect of His love, mercy, grace and power.

It does not mean that it does not matter how we live. God's children are known by their fruit, not by a false assurance of "once saved always saved". The claim that we can say that we are elected no matter how we live is not in the scripture and is not what we are speaking of at all.

It does not mean that we should not pray. God works through the prayers that He gives us and makes us His co-labourers. We are His vessels and are active in all things. He is the author in all things. We pray according to His will, being led by His Spirit.

It does not mean that we do not exercise bold faith. We *lay hold* of His covenant (1 Tim 6:12). His promises not mixed with faith will not profit (Heb 4:1-2). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). God loves genuine bold faith, *born from our relationship with Him*. The righteous are as bold as a lion (Pr 28:1). Lack of genuine fire of spirit in our lives shows a lack of love and a lack of His Spirit.

It does not mean that we should be timid with regard to the gifts of Spirit. We are to be forthright and bold in all the gifts of the Spirit as God's faith leads us. We should be bold against sickness, not thinking that if God wants people healed He will do it without us. We are to be bold in worship, not reserved waiting for God to move us. This way of taking God's sovereignty is not faith, but sluggishness of heart.

It does not mean that people do not make their own choice with regard to the gospel. Every person makes their own choice.

It does not mean believers have no free choice. God gave man free choice so His kingdom could be of love and not *force*. This is why Adam fell.

It does not mean that we are robots. His love makes us willing to co-operate with His purpose.

It does not mean that God predestinates some people to hell. God has no pleasure in the one who perishes. Those who perish do so because of their own sin, not because God appointed it. God does not appoint any single man to hell.

It does not mean that God will reject any person who comes to Him. Jesus said, "He who comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37). "Whomsoever will may come." (Rev 22:17).

It does not mean that we should be unsure of our election, or the election of those in our family. We have the inner witness of the Spirit that we are His children. We should raise our children diligently, teaching them to observe the word of God and then we should rest in His promises.

It does not mean that we "discern" those who are elect. It is God's counsel and not ours. Jesus said we will know them by their fruit. "Let those who name the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." (2 Tim 2:19).

It does not mean class or apartheid theology. The idea that people are born to a certain class and should not aspire to anything higher is ungodly. The denial that all men are born equal is oppressive. We may be born in different circumstances, but we should reach others and in mercy help one another. We should also work hard to improve our own lives. Class thinking is selfish, condescending and unloving.

The truths of God's sovereignty and grace are so alien to the human mind that they can be very easily misunderstood, rejected or abused. We are trained to think in a humanistic way and the doctrine of election sounds off alarm bells in our mind. Many of our objections show an uninformed understanding of the doctrine.

The Meaning of Election

Election is a biblical teaching. The New Testament shows what the doctrine means. A typical verse describing the church in the New Testament is:

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief in the truth: Whereto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thes 2:13-14).

The plain reading of this passage shows Paul's mind:

1. God has a particular love for His people which is distinct from His general love for the world.
2. God chooses us for salvation from the beginning, based on this particular love.
3. He then calls us to Himself through the gospel, which is the reason that we respond to the gospel and the reason why He arranged that the gospel be preached.

But we are never to assume that any people we preach to are not elected. We are to enthusiastically assume that all are. If any cancel themselves out, then they do that to themselves. God has not done it. We do not do it to any.

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (Rom 9:13).

This means that God chose Jacob, but did not choose Esau. He did not reject Esau. Esau rejected Him. This is in regards to salvation, not just to service. Romans 9 is about salvation. God called Jacob. We saw in a previous chapter that God has a perfect right to do this, without it offending His justice or love and without going against Jacob's or Esau's freedom.

Jacob was a swindler until he met God face to face at Peniel. God did not choose Jacob because of Jacob's qualities. God has the prerogative since all men and women are sinners. This highlights the love of God all the more, because He chose us while we were sinners. The hymn *Amazing Grace* expresses it well.

Romans 9

Romans 9 deals with election. We need to find out what it means from the Bible. In a way election is a mystery, like the trinity. It cannot be fully understood naturally. It just causes us to praise. In Romans 9, Paul explained why not all the nation of Israel was responding to the gospel of Christ. He said in vs. 6 that "not all Israel are Israel", which meant that not all Israel according to natural descent were *Israel* according to the election of God.

Isaac

In Rom 9:7 Paul explained this in relation to Isaac and Ishmael. They were both the descendants of Abraham, but Isaac was called by God while Ishmael was not. Clearly this had nothing to do with Isaac. It was settled before he was born. Isaac did not choose his mother Sarah.

We hear different attempts to change the plain meaning of Paul in this chapter. One is that the chapter is not dealing with salvation, but with vocation in the sense of service. Our calling to service is our calling to sonship. They are not two distinct calls. Secondly, Paul says at the beginning of the chapter and again in Rom 10:1 that he is speaking about the salvation of Israel. Salvation is the context of Romans 9 to 11 and it is the subject matter of the whole book of Romans.

Jacob

In Rom 9:11 Paul moves on to consider Jacob and Esau:

For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calls. (Rom 9:11).

Election is defined in this verse. God chose Jacob before he and Esau were born, so that the choice would not stand in anything that either Jacob or Esau would do, but in God's call alone.

Some have said concerning this that God made the choice based on His foreknowledge of Jacob's response. But that is not what the verse says. It says that God's choice was not made on the basis of works, whether foreknown or not, whether future or not. It was based entirely on God's own call. *It says emphatically that election stands on the call of God and not on works.*

Paul explains that just as Isaac had no part in his calling, so Jacob had no part in his. Paul's point here is that Israel is being saved, but *Israel* is not Israel according to the flesh or works, but *Israel* is the elect according to the promise of grace. In every one of Paul's epistles this is his position.

Moses

Paul explains further from what God said to Moses, "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Rom 9:15). This is where many object, saying, "This is not fair!"

Jesus said the same in a parable. There was a man who hired servants at different times of the day, but at the end of the day paid them all the same. Some were angry saying it was not fair to those who worked all day. Jesus answered, "The man gave them what was their due. He owed them no more. Why are you angry because the master was good?" (Matt 20:15).

So if a man has \$100 and gives \$50 to one man and none to another man, has the man done wrong? No, it was his money and he owed no one. He did well. He should be thanked, rather than accused. This parable shows up humanistic thinking. We do not have a right to demand that he give the other \$50. This was Jesus' point.

Pharaoh

God raised up Pharaoh and hardened his heart. This means that He did not show mercy to Pharaoh. God allowed evil to harden Pharaoh's heart instead, as that was Pharaoh's disposition anyway. God can do what He likes with the heart of man, without moral culpability on His part. Paul said it is not to him that wills, not to him that runs, but to God who shows mercy (Rom 9:16).

This means that salvation is not according to our decision or determination, but is founded upon God's mercy opening our eyes. The purpose of this is to produce in us humility.

Objection

To show that we understand Paul in Romans 9 correctly, we see the objection that Paul answered. The fact that this objection is raised shows that we are reading Paul's meaning the same way:

You will say to me, Why does He find fault? For who has resisted His will? No, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me like thus? (Rom 9:19-20).

Paul anticipated the human response by asking the question on our behalf, which basically says, "That is not fair.". His reply was short and simple. "Who are you O man to reply against God?" Then he called all men clay in the Maker's hands and further illustrated this as the chapter progressed, distinguishing the elect from the reprobate. It is not hard to understand why this is not preached in our time. It is certainly not acceptable in this age. Nevertheless, this is what Paul taught.

A Balanced View

Paul expressed the command of God to all to repent and man's free choice in it.

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30).

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46).

In Deut 30:19 men are called to choose life. God is not wicked but faithfully calls upon all men to follow His ways and live, for that is His desire. But men will reject God's gospel, being enemies of God, as Paul said, "For the natural mind is enmity against God" and "is not subject to His ways, neither can it be." (Rom 8:7). This is why the New Covenant is necessary and why grace alone can save us.

In Timothy, Paul said that God would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). In this passage Paul exhorts prayer for all men including rulers, that we may live a peaceable and godly life. This encourages the involvement of the church in civil life, not just to pray, but also to promote godliness. This is God's will. Sin and the evil things that man does are not God's will. But God will not necessarily stop men's plans.

2 Pet 3:9 similarly expresses God's longsuffering, due to His nature that does not delight in the destruction of any soul. This does not mean that every soul will be saved. God's longsuffering is a greater testimony against the unbelievers, who did not repent despite God's extended mercy, just as the passage states. This extension of mercy shows sinners to be "wilfully ignorant" (vs. 5). The mercy is genuinely extended, but due to man's nature, it serves only to highlight man's sin more.

Terms such as "not willing that any should perish", can refer to all His elect. That is, God holds back evil until He has brought in all His elect through the gospel. Terms such as "all men" and "all the world" refer to all races, kindred and tongues, as opposed to the belief that Jews only could be saved (Rev 5:9).

This is certainly what the term "all men" ("all flesh", Joel 2:28) meant in the Jewish mind. "For God so loved the world" in John 3:16 also shows that He has included all mankind in His plan of salvation, not just the Jew. This is certainly what Jesus was saying to the Jew Nicodemus.

God does genuinely love all the world, for God is love and He does genuinely desire that all be saved and not go on in their sin, but this does not mean that He will thwart the evil plans of all men. The genuineness of God's offer of salvation to all men highlights even more the breach between God's holiness and man, who hardens himself against such kindness.

The condemnation is that "light has come into the world and men loved darkness." (John 3:19). John 3:16 is given in this context, which Nicodemus found hard: that salvation would be offered to all, but that men would choose darkness. Jesus said that God would nevertheless choose some, "The wind blows where it wills", in referring to the Spirit's work (vs. 8, also John 1:13). Where *it* wills!

John 3:16 is an encouragement to all His children, to all that He calls: if we embrace the gospel and believe in His testimony we shall be saved. Likewise, His call, "To all who receive Him He gives power to become the children of God" is an encouragement to the faith of all who obey and believe the gospel (John 1:12).

God shall reject none who come to Him. Those whom God is not calling are happy not to come. They are not rejected by God. It is their choice. The Bible distinguished between calling generally, "many are called" and calling effectually, "Paul called to be an apostle." (Rom 1:1, Gal 1:1, Eph 1:1).

That God is *no respecter of persons* means He receives whoever does righteousness (Acts 10:34). There is no basis such as tribe, education, wealth or otherwise, which is the point about the passage regarding Cornelius.

The scripture also claims that none does good, so if any does good in God's eyes it is because he has received God's mercy (1 Cor 7:25, 2 Cor 4:1). "It is of faith, so that it might be of grace, to the end the promise may be sure to *all the seed*." (Rom 4:16). There is no respect of anything but grace. The promise then is sure to all the seed. *Seed* refers to the elect, not the natural seed.

Romans 8:29

Paul portrays the gospel as an eternal covenant established in God's heart before creation. His plan for us is not "hit or miss", but in the last day none shall be missing. The 144,000 in Revelation represents completeness (Rev 7:4).

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom 8:29).

What does *foreknow* mean? W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of Greek New Testament Words*, claims that *foreknow* means to have prescience, i.e. to merely know something before it happens. He claimed that God elects those whom He knows in advance will choose Him. Some call this *group election*; He elects *all those* who choose Christ.

Election means that God chooses. This is the plain biblical sense of the doctrine. If God elects us on the basis only of Vine's understanding of *foreknowledge* then it is man who ultimately elects. This means that election is of us and not of God. This overthrows the plain biblical teaching. Election does not mean that God merely endorses those who choose Christ. It means that He elects us individually and that He put us into Christ. "*Of God* are you in Christ Jesus." (1 Cor 1:30).

Foreknowledge

When *foreknowledge* is used in reference to God's omniscience, omnipotence and sovereignty, it means more than knowing ahead of time. In relation to God's attributes *foreknowledge* means:

1. God foreknew us in His heart by His own decision before creation. He knew us before creation because He had chosen us in Himself at that time.
2. Foreknowledge means *foreordination*. *Foreordination* means to ordain or to set in order before creation. *Foreordain* and *foreknowledge* come from the same Greek word.

The *omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence* of God settle all matters. They are not just theological terms. *Foreknowledge* indicates relationship. "Knowing" refers to an intimacy, such as "Adam knew his wife". *Pre-knowledge* refers to a previous intimacy within God's mind. Jesus will say to many, "I never knew you", meaning He had never chosen them in covenant relationship.

God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you..." (Jer 1:5). And Paul said, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace..." (Gal 1:15).

God did not only know the future in relation to Jeremiah. The scripture means that God chose Jeremiah from His own freedom and for His own reasons. God formed Jeremiah for a specific purpose, which He had in His heart before He formed him. This is not mere pre-knowledge.

In Amos 3:2, God speaks of a union with Israel: "You only have I known among all the families of the earth.". God knew the other nations, but not in the sense of calling and election.

God foreknew us in the sense that He had elected us and that we were in His plan. He already set His affections on us before we were born. Paul said, "Then shall I know, even as I am known" (1 Cor 13:12) and, "But now, after that you knew God, or rather are known of God..." (Gal 4:9). Paul puts the ball in God's court to correct their pride.

Arminianism denies the sovereign free will of God. It says that God is not Lord and sovereign over His creation to make His own choices with mankind. It says that God cannot have freedom and still be fair. *Foreknowledge* (when used of God) does not refer to God's pre-knowledge of our acceptance of Him, but to His free (un-obligated by our works) love for us.

The Greek

The Greek word in Rom 8:29 for *foreknew* means to preordain, or predetermine. It means that God foreknew our salvation in the sense that He pre-established it. God's foreknowledge is an attribute of His sovereignty: His freedom, omniscience and omnipotence. Peter uses the same Greek word:

Who (Christ) was truly *foreordained* (foreknown) before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. (1 Pet 1:20).

We know that God did not merely know ahead of time His Son's coming, but He predetermined it before creation. This verse speaks of the Father's personal intimacy with the Son. A Greek word from the same root is used in Acts where it means to pre-arrange:

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. (Acts 2:23).

The cross of Christ was not just something that God merely foreknew would happen, but it was something He foreordained. The same theology applies to our salvation. There are many Greek scholars who give this biblical meaning to God's foreknowledge. (See the *Word Biblical Commentary, Rom 8:29*, for an historical review of the fathers on this matter.)

Romans 8:30

Here Paul repeats his gospel message:

Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified. (Rom 8:30).

This verse says that before creation God predestinated an election of grace. Then in history, God called us by the gospel and then through new birth He justified us. He also preserved us to the end to glorify us in the resurrection. This shows that God does the whole work, from beginning to end.

This is what Paul said of himself: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace..." (Gal 1:15). God called Paul at the appointed time, because He had previously separated him by His own choice. This is Paul's view in every one of his epistles.

Rom 8:30 shows that salvation is an *eternal decree* and secure in Christ. It has fruit in our life now through faith. This is why in the early Scottish revival they were called *The Covenanters*. They believed in this eternal covenant.

Covenant theology was taught by the Puritans until the rise of Dispensationalism. Covenant theology claims that God made a covenant in Himself before creation, revealed and promised it to Abraham and then fulfilled it in Jesus Christ. This means that His counsel is absolute.

Some have come against this, using various premises. One of these is that Moses changed God's mind by his intercession, when God sought to destroy Israel. That is because it was God's plan. God planned to make some His co-labourers. God wanted an intercessor to bring glory to His kindness, so that we might trust in Him. God rose up Moses to know Him.

Ephesians

It is interesting to read through the salvation plan in Ephesians 1 and see if there is anything at all in the chapter that we did to get saved. Every verse is about God's action. This matches the covenant promise found in Ezekiel 36. It is all about what God would do, unconditional, distinct from the Old Covenant, all fulfilled by what His Son would do:

In vs. 1 Paul is an apostle *by the will of God*. In vs. 3 *God has blessed us* with every spiritual blessing in Christ; vs. 4, *He chose us* before the world; vs. 5, *He predestined us* to adoption, according to the good pleasure *of His will*; vs. 6, He made us accepted, to the praise *of His glory*.

In vs. 7, in Him we have redemption *through His blood*; vs. 8, *He abounded towards us* in all wisdom and prudence; vs. 9, according to *His good pleasure and purpose in Himself*; and in vs. 10, *He gathers His elect* together in Christ.

In vs. 11, *He predestined us* according to *His purpose*; vs. 12, we are to the praise *of His glory*; vs. 13, we believed *after hearing* the gospel and were *sealed by the Spirit*. This believing is the result of His will and purpose, made possible by the faith we received from Christ when we heard the gospel (Rom 10:17, Eph 2:8).

The gymnastics we have to do to overturn Paul's plain sense in this passage is much. This passage is the crescendo of Paul's gospel. After all his preaching and ministry he summarizes the whole matter under God.

We did not originate anything in Ephesians 1. The only thing we contribute to salvation is found in Eph 2:1-3: we were *dead in trespasses and sins*, in which we once walked. We were qualified for His redemption by our sin. That was our part.

And you has He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins...but God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ, by grace you are saved and has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

For by grace you are saved by faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created by God in Christ Jesus for good works, *which He has before ordained* that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:1-10).

All the apostles spoke of election. They saw the gospel go out and saw many responses and saw that it was God's work. See Titus 1:1, 1 Pet 1:2, 2 John 1:1 and Jude 1.

Jesus

Jesus said, "No one can come to Me except the Father draw Him." (John 6:44). He saw the Father's will as primary in all things. His prayer in John 17 outlines the same truth that we saw above in Rom 8:29.

I have manifested Your name to the men which *You gave Me* out of the world: They were Yours and You gave them to Me; and they have kept Your word...And all Mine are Yours...(John 17:6, 10).

Jesus said that those who believed on Him were those who were previously known of the Father and given to Jesus by Him. The Father had previously chosen and known them and this is the reason they responded to the person and preaching of Jesus.

Father's Ministry

Jesus did not argue with Judas. He said, "That which you do, do quickly.". He did not seek to persuade the unbelieving thief on the cross. He accepted the other thief on the cross whom the Father gave Him. He did not argue with the multitude of "disciples" who went away in John 6.

All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. (John 6:37-38).

This passage shows three things:

1. It shows the election side: *all that the Father gives Me come.*
2. It shows the Arminian side: *all who come I will in no wise cast out.*
3. And it shows Jesus' aim in ministry: to do His Father's will. Jesus did not struggle in ministry, but trusted and followed what His Father did. He had no ministry of His own. He did not save those He chose, but whom the Father gave.

This is how we preach the gospel. We do not choose whom God will save. We preach and God saves whom He calls. Jesus did not have a strategy to win the resistant Pharisees. He did not feed the multitude as an evangelism strategy, but from compassion. Those He fed went away from Him, so if it was an evangelism strategy it failed.

Jesus had no special counselling, discipleship or deliverance classes. He simply set free those the Father gave Him. He allowed the rich young ruler to go away. When people had faith He glorified God for giving it to them. Jesus heard from the Father and chose the twelve. The disciples had no say in the matter. Paul was called the same way: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)." (Gal 1:1).

I Have Chosen You

What Jesus said to His disciples corresponds to all believers in Christ:

You have not chosen Me, but *I have chosen you* and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain. (John 15:16).

This choice was not concerning ministry, but life and fellowship in Christ. We are not called to ministry. We are called to know Him. The ministry is the Father's. We receive the call when we are born again.

In the comparison of Jesus with the good shepherd, we see again the meaning of *foreknowledge*. *Knowing* refers to relationship derived from election:

I am the good shepherd and *know My sheep* and am known of Mine. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father...But you believe Me not, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. *My sheep hear My voice* and I know them and they follow Me." (John 10:14-15, 26-27).

Jesus persuaded nobody. He simply said My sheep hear My voice and follow Me and they will not follow a stranger. *This is how He knew His sheep*. If we need gimmicks and emotional persuasions to get people to accept Christ, they are not Christians. *Christians come at the call of Christ*. They hear His word.

Love

There is no greater love than *election love*. It is eternal love. Nothing shows the compassion and tenderness of God more than His salvation which is free and secure and depends entirely on Him and His shepherding care. Words cannot express this. A life cannot be changed by law or by adhering to duty, but only by seeing the unconditional love of God in Christ Jesus.

Universalism is not such a love, but a counterfeit. Love that does not change the life is not love at all. It is a total fraud. Whoever can accommodate the world does not know love and God will never accommodate it. Friendship with the world is enmity against God (James 4:4).

But God's love for those He knows is not accommodation, for He renews and changes them. Love that depends on our performance does not show a caring Father, but one who casts out His children. That is impossible with God and His family.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:37-39).

Election is summarized by this love. There is no other way that a persuasion such as Paul described is possible unless by an unconditional and eternal love. This alone is liberty in Christ. Christianity is an everlasting celebration of the goodness of God in Jesus Christ.

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no more worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring the best robe and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to make merry. (Luke 15:20-24).

Election cannot be understood by man. It is beyond our comprehension, just as several other aspects of God are. We do not reject what you do not understand, if God's word proclaims it.

Unconditional Love

Then went king David in and sat before the Lord and he said, Who am I, O Lord God and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this is a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God: but You have spoken also of Your servant's house for a great while to come.

And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say anymore to You, for You, Lord God, know Your servant. For Your word's sake and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them. (2 Sam 7:18-21).

God's love is not the way of man. It is unconditional *agape*. *Agape* means unconditional love. Man will only love you if you walk in the way they expect you to. God has unconditional love for His children. This is the strongest form of love we know.

"Peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give to you." (John 14:27). The world gives conditionally. We have to dance to their tune or they take their peace, acceptance and blessings back. God's love is unconditional. It changes the heart and forms it into a willing heart, not by coercion, but by the power of His love.

"There is no greater love than that a man should lay down His life for His friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:13-14). His friends keep His commandments. This is how we know that we know Him (1 John 2:3). It is not a condition, but a consequence of friendship.

It starts with God. His love causes us to love Him and keep His commandments. Only God's free acceptance of us in Christ enables us to respond to God in love. "Hereby we know the love of God, because He laid down His life for us (while we were sinners). We ought to lay down our life for the brethren." (1 John 3:16).

It is God's love for us that provides for and answers the "ought" in us. No other obedience is acceptable to Him, than that which works through His grace and love. All other is self-righteousness and falls short of His love.

We love Him, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19).

Adoption

The New Testament builds on the Old Testament theme, describing salvation as *adoption*. Israel was adopted. In the same way we are adopted:

According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world...having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph 1:4-5).

When parents in Western cultures adopt a child, they choose the child. The baby does not choose its parents. In ancient Roman culture the adoptee was usually older, but adoption was still the father's choice. Adoption is used to describe how God made us His children through Jesus Christ. The term shows that our inheritance is not by natural descent or merit.

There are no volunteers in heaven. Salvation is a "heavenly calling" (Heb 3:1). *Heavenly calling* does not just mean that God invites us through the gospel. The gospel does not invite God's children, it *calls* us in the sense of *compels*. We did not volunteer to be born into our natural family.

In a parable Jesus gave, an invitation went out to all, but they did not come. So the messengers were told to go back and bring some and *compel* others to come until the house was full (Luke 14:18-23). This “compelling” is the compelling of the call in our hearts through the gospel. It is the Spirit’s compelling. There is a *general call* of God’s Spirit to all and an *effectual call* to those who respond.

Paul said, “The love of Christ compels us.” (2 Cor 5:14). There is a compelling in the call, otherwise we would not respond to it. The calling of God is *conscriptio* through love. When a government conscripts us into the army, they do not invite us. We have no choice. We choose the Lord because we are compelled by His love through His call.

This means that He draws us and woos us, sometimes gently and sometimes with more notable power. Due to our experience of this, and in the light of God’s nature and the nature of man, we cannot conceive of salvation in any way but *irresistible grace*. Grace that is not irresistible is not fully grace.

“My heart is indicting a good matter...You are fairer than the children of men: grace is poured forth into Your lips...Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O most Mighty, with Your glory and with Your majesty.” (Ps 45:1-3). This is the good news, the power of His redemption and salvation, the stuff the best hymns are made of. Nothing stirs the heart more.

Father’s Secret Counsel

Why then are some His sheep and others not? Why does the Father give some to believe on Jesus and not others? Was it because we had done something special that the Father liked? Were we more humble, more believing, more accepting, more repentant, more open than the others?

The answer of the Bible is not any of these, but grace. Beyond grace the answer to this cannot be understood. The Father’s counsel regarding whom He has chosen and why is secret to man. We do not know the elect and cannot judge in the matter. It is the Father’s secret council. We know them only because they come to Jesus and stay (abide) in Christ (2 Tim 2:19). Jesus said:

I thank You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hid these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things are delivered to Me of the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him. (Matt 11:25-27).

Some hear God’s voice and others do not hear it. The answer as to why, is because the Father is drawing those who hear. They hear because of the love and kindness of a good God. Without this drawing we would not come. Why does God not call everyone in this way? This brings us back to Paul’s question in Romans 9. We do not know. God has not told us.

God’s general grace does draw everyone to a point. Everyone has the voice of conscience, but unless God effectually draws a man this *light* serves only to condemn man in the end. This is not an unfair condemnation, because the man did not want to be drawn effectually. He chose of himself not to be.

Blessed are you Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father which is in heaven. (Matt 16:17).

Paul said his calling was an example to us (1 Tim 1:13-17). He was called while actively working against God, not while seeking Him. He said he was a blasphemer and injurious to the church, but that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief.

This does not mean he found salvation because God saw that his heart was right. It means that God did not immediately condemn him for attacking the church, because he did not know what he was doing. God will often have mercy on a person's life when they come against Him.

However, when Paul describes his salvation he does not appeal to his own innocence, but only to the faith and love that are in Jesus.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry. Who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim 1:12-17).

He is thanking Jesus for enabling him. How did the grace of God enable Paul? It enabled him in many ways. Through it he was counted faithful. He obtained mercy. Through it his persecution against Christ was in ignorance and unbelief and not charged to him. It granted him faith and love. In all of these things Paul thanks God and does not appeal to his own credit. He said God did this for Paul as an encouragement to the faith of all He shall call.

I have been found by those who did not seek Me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me. (Rom 10:20, quoting Is 65:1).

Preservation

For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5).

John said he who is born of God overcomes the world. This means he perseveres to the end. He does this because the seed of God in him keeps him (1 John 3:9). It is the seed of God within that preserves us. John said that because His seed is in us we cannot sin, meaning we cannot continue in sin and be lost if we are born of God. John said this is how we know if we are born of God (1 John 3:6).

He who thinks that he keeps himself in God is committed to his own works and has not entered into rest.

For he that is entered into His rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from His. (Heb 4:10).

Jesus spoke regularly about the preservation of the saints:

And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man ever pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My hand. I and My Father are one. (John 10:29).

Paul said that he suffered all things for the elect's sake (2 Tim 2:10). He did not know who they were and many left him as false brethren, but he continued, knowing that God has His people. Jesus said that the elect cannot be deceived, though many false christs would try to deceive them (Matt 24:24).

Father is Keeper

This is called *eternal security*. It is due to the ministry of Jesus as High Priest, spoken of in the book of Hebrews. Because of His ministry of intercession we are *saved to the uttermost* as partakers of better promises. Jesus is the *surety* (Heb 7:22-28). This means He is the one who makes our salvation sure or secure.

Before going to the cross Jesus prayed for the church. He showed that the cross was not just to secure the forgiveness of sins, but also to secure the preservation of the saints. Jesus prayed:

Holy Father, keep through Your own name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one, as We are. (John 17:11).

Jesus did not commit the keeping of ourselves to ourselves, but He placed us firmly in the Father's hands. Jesus would only trust the Father with those He came to redeem. He knew that if He committed anything to us we would mess it up, just like they did in the Old Covenant.

Now to Him that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. (Jude 1:24).

Eternal Life

And this is the Father's will that sent Me, that all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up the last day. And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that everyone that sees the Son, and believes on Him, may have eternal life: and I will raise Him up at the last day. (John 6:40).

John 6 is about the eternal nature of the salvation that Jesus gives. It is through eating His flesh and drinking His blood. It is eternal life. There is no way, no way at all, that this could not mean eternal security. When we mock eternal security, we mock the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is the bread that came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die...I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if a man eat thereof, he shall live forever...(John 6:51).

We are not speaking of the flesh and blood of animals here. Jesus said in John 6 that those who are born of His blood have everlasting life and that is final. That is why He came.

It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard and has learned of the Father, comes to Me. (John 6:45).

This is a quote from Is 54:13, "All Your seed shall be taught of the Lord." This is not speaking of our children, but of the elect, that the Father has given the Son. Isaiah 54 refers to Christ's sufferings, "O afflicted and storm tossed." (Is 54:11). Then it continues, "I will lay Your stones with fair colours and Your foundations with sapphires." (Is 54:11). This is the church. Then Is 54:13 peaks of His seed in the New Covenant.

See also 1 Cor 1:8-9, 1 Thes 5:23-24, 2 Thes 3:3, 2 Tim 1:12, 2:19, 4:18, Heb 7:25, 1 Pet 1:4-5, which all speak of God's preserving His saints.

Salvation Means Glorification

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:6).

Looking to Jesus, the author and *finisher* of our faith...(Heb 12:2).

Some have said that we need balance between grace and responsibility. That is missing the point. We do not balance the two covenants. We are either in law or in grace. If we balance the two covenants we are under a curse (Gal 3:10). Some have also said that there are many Bible verses that tell us to keep ourselves, to stand, etc. This is true. We are co-workers with Him. The Christian is a soldier who stands in the faith he has been given. But it is God's faithfulness in which we trust and which keeps us.

Sons Keep Themselves

We keep ourselves because He has made us sons:

We know that whosoever is born of God sins not; but he that is begotten of God keeps himself and that wicked one touches him not. (1 John 5:18).

Those who obey God are His sons. Jesus gave a parable about two sons; one obeyed and one did not obey. Then He asked, which did the will of God, meaning which one was a son? His answer was the one who obeyed (Matt 21:31). The doctrine of eternal security is not saying we do not have to obey God. It is saying those who are sons do obey God. But the credit for keeping us is His.

We do not bear fruit to maintain our security, but because we are sons. An apple tree does not bear apples to be an apple tree. It bears apples because it is an apple tree. If it stops bearing apples it is cut down. But if it is a good tree it will not stop bearing them.

You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. (Matt 7:16-17).

Sons abide (stay) in Christ (John 15). They do not go away, as Peter said, "You alone have the words of eternal life, to whom shall we go?" (John 6:68).

Preserved in Christ

Jesus said to the Father:

...those that You gave Me I have kept and none of them is lost ...I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil. (John 17:12, 15).

Christ's victory is complete. He has lost none that the Father has given Him. This was the prayer of Jesus in John 17:

1. Those You gave Me have come to Me.
2. I have lost none of them.
3. Father, keep them.
4. I pray not for the world, but for those You gave Me out of the world.

Conclusion

The Bible shows a balanced view that God makes sons who participate and are responsible in their salvation, but also that God is the author and finisher of that salvation and by this it is made sure to all the seed. The elect continue in faith and godly life (Heb. 3:6; 6:11; 10:35-39).