

**Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians**  
**(3) How to Know You Are One of God's Elect (part 1)**

**Introduction:**

Today we begin to address a very important matter, a matter that should be of interest for each of us, even of great concern for us. The Holy Scriptures tell us that we should be very earnest and put forth great effort to assure ourselves that God has chosen us and called us unto salvation. Peter wrote, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall..." (2 Pet. 1:10). This command leads to a question that each of us to ask, "How may I know that I am called of God unto salvation and how may I know that I am one of God's elect?" In the context of Peter's admonition, he gave instruction on how to perform this great task, and we could look there to guide us in this most important endeavor. But we may also seek direction here, in the passage before us, which we will do today and next Lord's Day, Lord willing. But let us again read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the church at Thessalonica with special attention to **verse 4**.

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>***For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,*** <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup>For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:1-10)

The apostle wrote to this church after having received a good report of it from Timothy. Timothy had reported to Paul their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). Paul was convinced that God had elected (chosen) the members of this church to receive His salvation from their sin. Paul wrote to them, "for we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you."

Paul described them as "***brothers loved by God.***" Most folks assume that God loves all people alike, whether Christian or not, but the Bible does not teach this. But contrary to the belief of most people, God does not love everyone alike. Although God is loving to all, because He is love--that is His nature--He loves His own people with a special, eternal, covenant love. This is an important matter.

God reveals quite clearly and quite frequently in His Word that He has a love for His people that is unique and special, a special love for them that He does not have for the world. We read that Christ loves His church, and gave Himself for it. John 13:1, "Then Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, ***having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.***"

The love that God has for His people is special, for He loves them because He regards them as spiritually united to Himself. Our Lord Jesus revealed a glorious truth about the nature of God's love for His people in His prayer to His Father in John 17. Here are our Lord's words:

I in them, and You in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that **You** sent Me, and **have loved them as You have loved Me**. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:23, 24).

These words cannot be ascribed to all people indiscriminately, but to the elect of God only. Christ is only “in them”; therefore, it can only be said of them that the Father has loved them as He had loved His Son. This statement is in accordance with Paul’s words in Romans 8:38-39:

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**.

Now we should say a word about the translation of verse 4, which we have in the English Standard Version (ESV). Again, it reads, “For we know, brothers loved by God, that **he has chosen you**.” This is not the most literal of translations. The New King James Version better reflects the Greek grammar, for it reads, “knowing, beloved brethren, **your election by God**.” The ESV has taken the noun, “election” and has made it into a verb, “has chosen you.”<sup>1</sup> I don’t know why the translators did so, perhaps they were attempting to make the doctrine of God’s election of sinners unto salvation less pronounced. Their motivation was perhaps to offer a translation that would be less likely to have a negative reaction by its readers, for this doctrine of election is not valued by many.

## **I. Man’s aversion to sovereign grace and the doctrine of election**

Indeed, the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace in salvation, of electing sinners unto their salvation, is actually hated by most people, those both outside but also inside “the church.” **Charles Spurgeon** once gave a sermon entitled, “**Sovereign grace hated by Religionists**.” He declared the natural enmity of fallen man toward the doctrine of God’s sovereign grace:

If anything is hated bitterly, it is the out-and-out gospel of the grace of God, especially if that hateful word “sovereignty” is mentioned with it. Dare to say “He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion” (Romans 9:15), and furious critics will revile you without stint. The modern religionist not only hates the doctrine of sovereign grace, but he raves and rages at the mention of it. He would sooner hear you blaspheme than preach election by the Father, atonement by the Son, or regeneration by the Spirit. If you want to see a man worked up till the Satanic is clearly uppermost, let some of the new divines (ministers) hear you preach a free grace sermon. A gospel which is after men will be welcomed by men; but it needs divine operation upon the heart and mind to make a man willing to receive into his inmost soul this distasteful gospel of the grace of God. My dear brethren, do not try to make it tasteful to carnal minds. Hide not the offense of the cross, lest you make it of none effect. The angles and corners of the gospel are its strength and to pare them off is to deprive it of power. Toning down is not the increase of strength, but the death of it. Learn, then, that if you take Christ out of Christianity, Christianity is dead. If you remove grace out of the gospel, the gospel is gone. If the people do not like the doctrine of grace, give them all the more of it. I preach the doctrines of grace because I believe them to be true; because I see them in the Scriptures; because my experience endears them to me; and because I see the holy result of them in believers. The

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<sup>1</sup> Actually the translators disregarded other grammatical points of the original Greek text. They translated the pronoun, “you”, as a noun, serving as a direct object in their translation--“he has chosen you”; however, in the Greek it is possessive of election--“**your** election of God.” They also made God (“he”) the subject of the clause--“he has chosen you”, but in the original Greek God is not mentioned directly in the clause. In the Greek text, “election” is the object of the earlier participle, “knowing”, which should be translated, “knowing your election.” Here “God” is understood, but not overtly stated, to have been the One having elected (or chosen) them unto salvation.

doctrine which I preach to you is that of the Puritans: it is the doctrine of Calvin, the doctrine of Augustine, the doctrine of Paul, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The Author and Finisher of our faith Himself taught the most blessed truth which well agreed with our text--“For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). (Charles Spurgeon, *Sovereign Grace Hated by the Modern Religionist*)<sup>2</sup>

The reason that people hate sovereign grace is due to the effect of the fall of man into sin. At the heart of Adam and Eve’s sin was their desire to usurp God’s sovereignty over their lives and become autonomous, that is, they desired to determine for themselves how they would live in His world; they chose to rule themselves rather than God who had created them. The serpent had told Eve, “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). The serpent was tempting Eve (and Adam through her) to assert for herself the role of god of her own life. She would be the determiner of her own life, her own destiny. And fallen man ever since then has insisted that he is the one who determines his eternal destiny. And so, when the doctrine of sovereign grace is presented and understood, the immediate reaction is one of offense, rejection, and objection.

It is commonly assumed then, that a fallen man has the ability in and of himself, granted, with some help of the Holy Spirit, to believe savingly on Christ of his own free will. One described the prevailing position in this way:

In much of present-day evangelism it is assumed that the one thing man can do in the exercise of his own liberty is to believe in Christ for salvation. It is supposed that this is the one contribution that man himself must make to set the forces of salvation in operation and that even God himself can do nothing towards this end until there is this crucial decision on man’s own part. In this assessment there is total failure to reckon with human depravity, with the nature of the contradiction that sin involves. Paul tells us that not only is the mind of the flesh not subject to the law of God but also that it cannot be (Rom. 8:7). This impossibility extends to the gospel as well. It is the implication of Paul’s other word that “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). But to this truth we have the most pointed and express witness of our Lord himself. “No man can come unto me, except the Father who hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44); “no man can come unto me, except it were given to him of the Father” (John 6:65). Here is the witness of him who knows what is in man and who knows the Father as the Father knows him. And it is to the effect that it is a moral and spiritual impossibility for a man to come unto him except by the free gift from the Father in his secret and efficacious drawing. (John Murray)

But we need not take the word of men of the natural aversion, even hatred of fallen man toward this doctrine, for we see it displayed for us in Holy Scripture. In John 6 our Lord Jesus proclaimed God’s sovereign grace before the crowds who had gathered to hear Him, many of which who claimed to be His disciples. By the end of his teaching session, almost all had forsaken Him, for He had taught them sovereign grace.

Here is the setting of the passage: the day before the Lord Jesus had performed the great miracle of multiplying bread with which He fed a multitude. This resulted in a large “devoted following” looking for Him the next day. They had their felt needs met, they had been hungry, and they wanted more of the same. This will always gather enthusiastic crowds, but it will not insure genuine converts to Jesus Christ. Our Lord knew this and told them so. John 6:26, “***Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.***” Throughout His discourse, our Lord set forth the sovereign grace of God in bringing sinners to salvation. He declared the following:

<sup>36</sup>But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup>***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me***, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1891, page 49.

from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup>This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that *of all He has given Me I should lose nothing*, but should raise it up at the last day.

<sup>43</sup>Jesus therefore answered and said to them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. <sup>44</sup>*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*; and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>45</sup>It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall all be taught by God.’”

<sup>61</sup>When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup>What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? <sup>63</sup>*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing*. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. <sup>64</sup>But there are some of you who do not believe.” Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. <sup>65</sup>And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that *no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father*.”

<sup>66</sup>From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

At the beginning of John 6 our Lord had well over 5,000 men clamouring to see and hear Him. At the end of John 6 our Lord had 12 disciples remaining, and they were standing in doubt of Him, largely because He was proclaiming God’s sovereign grace in salvation. People do not like sovereign grace. They did not like it when the Lord Jesus preached it in His home synagogue (Cf. Luke 4:16-30). They did not like it when He preached it here.

And so, this matter of God’s sovereign grace in His election of sinners unto salvation is a subject of great debate. It is one that generates a great deal of controversy and division. Hard things are said about this doctrine and the ones who hold it. A great deal of false accusation is leveled against those who hold to the biblical teaching of God’s election of a people to be saved. It is not a subject that one can just skip over if he truly desires to understand the Scriptures, for it is a matter that is taught throughout the Bible. God has chosen for Himself out of fallen humanity a people and they will be saved. God the Father has *chosen* them. The Son of God has *redeemed* them. The Holy Spirit *applies* the salvation purchased by Christ to them, one by one. The point of the matter is this: *God has purposed that Jesus Christ would save His chosen people—His Elect*.

Paul was not ashamed of the doctrine of sovereign grace. He gloried in it. His whole life was given over to seeing the elect of God come to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. He wrote to Timothy, “I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).

Today I would like us to consider this subject generally. Perhaps we will clear up some misunderstanding. May the Lord help us to glory in the sovereign grace of God, as we rehearse it and reflect upon it.

## **II. The doctrine of election explained and defended**

Let us first consider a formal statement and explanation of this doctrine of divine election. The biblical doctrine of divine election may be understood in this way:

*God has chosen certain persons from fallen humanity to be recipients of His salvation, having chosen them in Christ before creation, not based on any foreseen condition or response of them, but solely due to His own good pleasure according to the purpose of His will.*

Divine election of sinners unto salvation follows from the understanding of man’s total depravity, or total inability to come to God. Left on his own, even after having been instructed, admonished, persuaded, and pleaded with, man would still choose to reject God’s rule over him, for he is spiritually dead, both incapable and unwilling to do the things God has commanded him. His salvation must originate from outside of himself. It originates in God’s election and brought to pass through God’s grace.

There is no indication in the Scriptures of a reason that God chose the ones He chose, passing over the others, other than it was good in His sight and it was in accord with His purpose to glorify Himself in His grace. The Scriptures declare that He loved His own with an everlasting love; He chose to save them unto Himself from their sin.

The Bible teaches that election is unto salvation. Although God's election of some means His passing over others, hence, a doctrine of reprobation, nevertheless, election is always presented in the Scriptures positively unto salvation. Persons are not elected to damnation; persons are elected unto their salvation.

God purposed and will most certainly obtain the salvation of His people and no others. The statement of the **First London Baptist Confession**, written in 1646 states the matter well:

We affirm, that as Jesus Christ never intended to give remission of sins and eternal life unto any but His sheep (John 10:15; 17:2; Eph. 5:25, 26, 27; Rev. 5:9); so these sheep only have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ: The vessels of wrath, as they are none of Christ's sheep, nor ever believe in Him, so they have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon them, neither are partakers of Him: and therefore have all their sins remaining upon them, and are not saved by Christ from any of them under any consideration whatsoever; but must lie under the intolerable burden of them eternally. The truth of this appears unto us by the light of these Scriptures compared together, Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2; Hebrews 3:14; Matthew 7:23; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 8:24. [First London Confession of Faith with an appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646.]

The term "predestination", although often used interchangeably with the term "election" should be distinguished from it. Predestination speaks of God's design for the ones He elected. Election speaks of God's choice. Predestination speaks of what God chose them to become. God has predestined His elect to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29), to become His adopted sons (Eph. 1:5), and to be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11).

It is an undeniable fact that the Bible presents God as securing the redemption of His people in history. God has not purposed to save all of humanity, but rather some of the human race. From the beginning of the Bible to its end, we set before us that God has purposed to save His people by His grace.

God did not attempt to save the entire world in Noah's day. *Noah* found grace in God's eyes to the salvation of His household. God purposed not to save the entire human race in that day, but to overwhelm it with a destroying flood. But He purposed that not all would be lost. He chose to save Noah and his household.

Later in the calling of Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 12 and following, we see that it was not God's purpose to save all who lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Nor was it God's purpose to "bless" all of Abraham's family. Abraham and certain of his descendants were singled out of a land of idolaters, God having chosen Abraham to become the head of a great nation. And God had not purposed to save all of Abraham's family. Abram was to leave his family and travel to a land far away, for God had purposed to save him and his descendants and not the others.

But God had not chosen all of Abraham's own descendants to be saved. God elected some of Abraham's descendants to be in covenant relationship with Him. God chose to reject others, leaving them in their sin. Of Abraham's own sons, Isaac was elected; Ishmael was not. And even of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau, God chose Jacob to be saved; He did not choose Esau. In fact the selection of the one brother and the rejection of the other is used in Scripture to prove this matter of God's election that it is by God's sovereign choice, or election, that people are saved; it is not according to works (Cf. Rom. 9:10ff).

Let us look at this passage in more detail, **Romans 9:6-15**. Paul explained the matter of election citing God's choice of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The context of this passage is Paul refuting the charge that God must have failed to accomplish His intention to save Israel because most of them rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Paul said that this was not the case. Rather, the explanation of why God only saved some within Israel is to be found in the doctrine of election. Paul showed that the rejection of the Messiah by Israel was perfectly consistent with God's purposes in election, for the Bible records that God

never did intend to save all of the physical descendants of Abraham, but rather only those that He chose. In Romans 9:6 we begin to read:

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, *“In Isaac your seed shall be called.”* That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: *“At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.”* And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, *“The older shall serve the younger.”* As it is written, *“Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.”* What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For this is a word of promise, According to this season will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so; but Rebecca also having conceived by one, (even) by our father Isaac, for (the children) being not yet born, *neither having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, “The elder shall serve the younger.”* Even as it is written, *“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”* What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

The Lord Jesus Himself perhaps taught more about the matter of election than any other recorded in Scripture. John 6 is a clear setting forth of the doctrine that God has intended to save the ones that He chose to be saved and that, indeed, they would be saved. In a number of different ways He stated that His Father would see to it that His people would be saved. He stated, *“All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”* (John 6:37). You cannot read John 6 honestly and understand it rightly, and not conclude that the Bible teaches the elect will be everlastingly saved, but only the elect will be saved.

We may also consider **John 17:1ff**. Here we read our Lord’s own words recorded and see that this doctrine cannot be dismissed or discredited, if His Words are considered carefully and honestly. Here we have the content of a prayer that Jesus prayed to His Father. In this prayer the Lord Jesus speaks of God’s purpose in grace and He speaks to the end for which He was sent into the world, to save God’s chosen people, the ones that the Father had given to Him and for whom He was sent to die.

17:1, 2 -- Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that ***He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.***”

17:6 – “I have manifested Your name ***to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me,*** and they have kept Your word.

17:9, 10 – “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world ***but for those whom You have given Me,*** for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them.

17:11, 12 – “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name ***those whom You have given Me,*** that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

17:24 -- “Father, I desire that ***they also whom You gave Me*** may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which you have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

From this passage the following may be said:

**1. True believers are a gift from the Father to the Son.** Seven times in the prayer our Lord refers to the believers as those who have been given to Him by the Father.

- a. “as many as thou hast given him” (v. 2)
- b. “the men which thou gavest me” (v. 6)
- c. “thou gavest them me” (v. 6)
- d. “them which thou hast given me” (v. 9)
- e. “those whom thou hast given me” (v. 9)
- f. “those that thou gavest me” (v. 12)
- g. “they also, whom thou hast given me” (v. 24)

One does not, therefore, really give himself, or give his heart, to the Lord with salvation. The ones who belong to Christ have already been given to Him from the Father. Our relationship to the Saviour is not established upon the basis of anything that we can do, but upon what has already been done by another. In all of this we are viewed as completely passive. The Father chose us and gave us to His Son.

**2. True believers were originally the Father’s possession (v.6).**

In one of the above connections the Saviour stated with reference to the believers that they were a gift from the Father: “Thine they were” (v. 6). Since the entire passage has a redemptive setting and the believers are seen as separate from the world throughout, the reference could not be to the Father's ownership in the sense of creation. This would encompass all mankind and the statement would be without meaning in such a context. The only reasonable explanation of these words is that the believers belonged to the Father by election. This is viewed as an absolute right--so much so that they may be given as specific individuals in the form of gifts from the Father to the Son. Observe that this is personal and individual, rather than corporate election. This is indicated by the repetition of the personal pronouns.

**3. True believers are the objects of Christ’s mercy and grace.**

In distinction to the world (i.e., the mass of humanity) these believers are set aside for blessing in several aspects:

**a. They are given eternal life (v. 2).** While our Lord achieved supreme power “over all flesh” in His work, He does not grant eternal life to all. Only those previously marked out in the election receive salvation. This is a ministry limited to the chosen ones. There is a discriminatory grace.

**b. They are the objects of His intercession (v. 4).** It will be noticed that He says, “I pray not for the world, but for them which You have given me.” Here is a selected group and a limited ministry. It goes no wider than to those who have been individually and specifically chosen in election.

**c. They are divinely kept (vv. 11, 12).** Worldlings, in the guise of believers, are not kept from falling. Such was Judas, and he is lost. Here again is a limited ministry of the Lord. Only His own are kept from falling.

**d. They will be with Him in glory (v. 24).** Those who have been given to Christ by the Father will behold His glory in heaven. This is guaranteed. The mere professor, however, has no such “blessed hope.” This is, once more, a limited ministry of Christ, extended only to the elect. The non-elect will not see His glory, except in judgment.

There are many other passages that speak to this matter. Consider these:

**Ephesians 1:4.** “Even as *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love...”

**2 Timothy 1:9.** “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began...”

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29.** “For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, (are called): but *God chose the foolish things* of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise; and *God chose the weak things* of the world, that he might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and *the things that are despised, did God choose*, (yea) and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are: that no flesh should glory before God.”

**John 15:16.** “You did not choose me, *but I chose you*, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and (that) your fruit should abide: that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

**Act 13:48.** “And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God: and *as many as were ordained to eternal life* believed.”

### III. Arguments against the biblical doctrine of election

But what of those who pose objections to the doctrine of election? There are several common arguments, all of them are spurious. Some say,

*“This doctrine makes God unjust with respect to those whom He did not choose. How can they be held responsible for their sins if God did not choose them?”*

The answer is a simple one. This argument reveals a terrible lack of understanding of God’s justice and levels a charge against God which calls for rebuke (cf. Rom. 9:19ff.). People are condemned because of their sin, not because God did not choose them. Men are condemned “already” unless Christ pardons them (John 3:18). Simply because God can pardon them, it does not follow that God must pardon them, or that He is unjust if He refuses to pardon all. God is perfectly just to administer judgment to sinful man for his own iniquity.

A second common argument against divine election is that

*“To believe this doctrine would discourage evangelism. What is the point of witnessing if God is going to save whom He will save, if not one He has chosen will be lost and not one He has not chosen will be saved?”*

But on the contrary, the greatest soul-winners in church history were encouraged and emboldened because they knew that God had a people which would be saved through their instrumentality. Election was a basis for Christ to encourage Paul in His work of evangelism at the city of Corinth (Acts 18:9-11). Again, the First London Baptist Confession states the matter well:

Though some of our opponents do affirm, that by this doctrine we leave no Gospel to be preached to sinners for their conversion; yet through the goodness of God we know and preach to sinners this precious Gospel: “God so loved the world, (that is, has been so loving to mankind) that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life,” John 3:16; and this faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, “That Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinner,” 1 Tim. 1: 15, viz., all those sinners (how vile and grievous soever) not only which already do, but also which hereafter shall believe on Him to everlasting, 1 Tim. 1:16, and that to Christ all the Prophets give witness, that through His name, whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins,” Acts 10:43. And this is called “The word of the Gospel,” Acts 15:7. This is the Gospel which Christ and His Apostles preached, which we have received and by which we have been converted unto Christ. And we desire to mind what Paul saith in Gal. 1:9, “If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” -- First London Confession of Faith with an appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646.

A third common argument against election is this:

*“This doctrine makes God a respecter of persons, and the Bible teaches that God is not a respecter of persons.”*

But this charge reflects a misunderstanding of what it means for God not to be a respecter of persons. God *is* a respecter of persons in that He chooses one and passes over another. He *is not* a respecter of persons in that there is nothing in the individual or nothing the individual has done, or will do that moves God to deal with him in grace. That God is not a respecter of persons means that God judges men impartially, not showing favoritism due to anything in and of themselves (1 Pet. 1:17; cf. Deut. 1:17). It means also that God does not bring salvation based of bloodline (Acts 10:43).

There are other challenges. The following is taken from **Kenneth Good’s** book, *God’s Gracious Purpose*.<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of election has been variously explained by different schools of thought--sometimes in obvious confusion about the actual meaning of the Scriptures, but in honest heart; and at other times with a deliberate determination to protect the notion of “free will” at any cost. The following erroneous theories have been expressed:

1. That election refers only to Christ as the One who was marked out to provide the perfect salvation. Those who choose to be in Him are therefore the elect among men.
2. That election refers merely to a plan of redemption as the only way of salvation. Those who choose to be saved by this plan are therefore the elect.
3. That election refers to a corporate body rather than to individuals. The redeemed of all ages or the church may thus be viewed corporately (and only corporately) as the elect. Again, those who choose to become part of this predetermined number may be called the elect.
4. That election refers only to service and not to salvation. Therefore the matter of salvation is wholly in the realm of human choice, and those who choose correctly are the elect.
5. That election refers to the action of God before the beginning of the human race in which He chose those individuals to salvation whom He knew (in His omniscience) would react properly to the Gospel when they heard it. Again, those who choose to be saved become, by God’s adjustment of His program to their wills, the elect.

Various modifications or combinations of the above mistaken concepts have been developed and set forth over the years in an attempt to soften, modify, evade, or contradict the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Since it is not the purpose of this treatise to enter into theological controversy, but simply to

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Good, *God’s Gracious Purpose* (Baker, 1979).

set forth what the Scriptures teach (especially in John's Gospel), we therefore leave the matter of researching the related New Testament Scriptures to the student. We would suggest a careful study of the following passages as providing ample refutation of the above theories as well as corroboration of the interpretation set forth of the doctrines of grace in the "whosoever Gospel" (Matthew 7:23; 20:13,15; Mark 13:27; Luke 4:25-27; 18:7; Acts 5:31; 11:18; 13:48; 18:10; Romans 8:28-9:24; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-10; Philippians 2:13; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:10; Titus 1:1; Revelation 13:8; 20:15; 21:27). This is not an exhaustive list by any means, but represents some of those texts which, apart from John's Gospel, teach the same truths emphasized in this treatise. The truth of unconditional election is taught plainly in the words of our Lord and is corroborated by the words of the apostles.

We would state very strongly that God's sovereign grace in election must be taught by us, although we and our teaching will be hated for it. The teaching of sovereign grace caused many of Jesus' "disciples" to turn away from Him and no longer walk with Him (cf. John 6:66). If you teach election, many people will reject you. Why? There is nothing that confronts and stirs up the pride of man than to tell him that he is deserving of God's eternal wrath, that there is nothing about himself that will merit God's favor toward him, and that unless God take the initiative and carry it through to the end, he will perish everlastingly.

The Holy Spirit must teach God's sovereign grace in election to us, or it will not be understood and embraced by us. Paul indicated in his epistle to the Ephesian believers that he prayed continuously for the believers at Ephesus that God would open their eyes to the fact that they had been chosen by God, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and loved with an everlasting love (cf. Eph. 1:15ff; 3:14ff). Unless God helps us to understand and embrace these things, we will continue in unreasoned ignorance and stubborn rejection of them.

To quote once again Charles Spurgeon, he described his own coming to believe this biblical teaching. His piece of writing is called *How I Learned Grace*:

Well can I remember the manner in which I learned the doctrines of grace in a single instant. Born as all of us are by nature, an "Arminian," I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me. I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received these truths in my own soul — when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron: I can recollect how I felt that I had grown all of a sudden from a babe into a man — that I had made progress in scriptural knowledge, through having found, once for all, the clue to the truth of God. One weeknight when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "how did you come to be a Christian?" (...I sought the Lord). But how did you come to seek the Lord? — (the truth flashed across my mind in a moment) — I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, "How came I to pray?" — I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. I did read them; but what led me to do so? — Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith; and as the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make it my constant confession. I ascribe my change wholly to God.

Can you be a true Christian and not understand this or accept this doctrine? Of course, but I would argue that you cannot be a mature Christian, or one that brings full glory to God, until this biblical teaching is understood, believed, and celebrated.

Since we have seen the extreme importance of our need to be numbered among the elect of God, it should serve to make us to give all diligence to make our calling and election certain to us (CF 2 Pet. 2:10). But how may we know? Well Paul knew that these Christians in the church of Thessalonica were numbered

among God's elect, for he said so in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, "***knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.***"

In the passage under study, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Paul identified at least **six reasons** that convinced him that these Christians were numbered among the elect of God. We will address them in turn next Lord's Day, Lord willing, but we will cite them here in closing.

(1) Paul knew of their election by God ***because of the manner in which the gospel had been at work among them.*** In **verse 5** Paul wrote, "because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction."

(2) Paul knew of their election by God ***because of the manner they received the Word of God proclaimed to them.*** In **verse 6** Paul wrote, "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit."

(3) Paul knew of their election by God ***because they became examples of how believers ought to live in the world.*** In **verse 7** Paul wrote, "so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

(4) Paul knew of their election by God ***because they proclaimed the Word of God to others, seeking to evangelize the world in which God had placed them.*** In **verse 8** Paul wrote, "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything."

(5) Paul knew of their election by God ***because of their repentance from sin to serve the true God.*** In **verse 9** Paul wrote, "For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

(6) Paul knew of their election by God ***because they were joyfully anticipating the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.*** In **verse 10** Paul wrote, "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thess. 1:1-10)

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Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

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