

Predestination; *An Introduction*

ANDREW DAVID NASELLI



SHORT STUDIES *in*
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Edited by Graham A. Cole & Oren R. Martin

“Andy Naselli believes the subject of predestination is far too biblical and much too precious to keep hidden. It speaks of God’s glorious sovereignty and the wonder of his saving grace, as well as his holiness and justice. If you’ve avoided the subject for fear of offending someone or perhaps out of your own ignorance of what the word means, this book is for you. Naselli explores in a deeply profound but highly intelligible way what the Bible says about this controversial topic. I love this book and can’t recommend it too highly.”

Sam Storms, Founder and President, Enjoying God Ministries

“Andy Naselli makes a strong biblical case for election and reprobation. He aims not just to convince the mind but also to stir the heart to worship the sovereign Savior. Not all readers will agree with every facet of Naselli’s argument, but he demonstrates that the doctrine of predestination is firmly grounded in Romans 9 and other passages of the Holy Scriptures.”

Joel R. Beeke, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Andy Naselli has given us a concise, accessible, and faithful treatise on the often-misunderstood topic of predestination. This book will become the go-to resource for both advocates and naysayers, helping Christians better understand God’s faithfulness and sovereignty.”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*

“When we avoid discussing difficult biblical and theological subjects like predestination, we not only neglect what Scripture clearly teaches but also impoverish our view of God and therefore rob ourselves of the truth, comfort, and confidence that the doctrine is meant to give. For this reason, I am thrilled to recommend this book. Andy Naselli faithfully expounds the Bible’s teaching on predestination—and in such a way that we are led to glory in our triune God of sovereign grace and challenged to apply biblical truth to our lives in all of its breadth and depth. If you want to know what Scripture teaches about predestination, how to answer the common objections to it, and how to apply its truth to your life, then this book is for you.”

Stephen J. Wellum, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“How does one write a simple and clear treatment of one of the most complex and challenging doctrines? I’m not entirely sure, but that is precisely what Andy Naselli has done. This book provides an accessible and careful treatment of predestination that will serve pastors, laypeople, and all those who want to learn more about the wonders of God’s glory in election. Take, read, and be stirred to worship.”

Steven Lee, Pastor for Preaching and Vision, The North Church,
Mounds View, Minnesota

Predestination

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Predestination

An Introduction

Andrew David Naselli

To Phil Gons,
chosen by God

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Series Preface

The ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus reputedly said that the thinker has to listen to the essence of things. A series of theological studies dealing with the traditional topics that make up systematic theology needs to do just that. Accordingly, in each of these studies, a theologian addresses the essence of a doctrine. This series thus aims to present short studies in theology that are attuned to both the Christian tradition and contemporary theology in order to equip the church to faithfully understand, love, teach, and apply what God has revealed in Scripture about a variety of topics. What may be lost in comprehensiveness can be gained through what John Calvin, in the dedicatory epistle of his commentary on Romans, called “lucid brevity.”

Of course, a thorough study of any doctrine will be longer rather than shorter, as there are two millennia of confession, discussion, and debate with which to interact. As a result, a short study needs to be more selective but deftly so. Thankfully, the contributors to this series have the ability to be brief yet accurate. The key aim is that the simpler is not to morph into the simplistic. The test is whether the topic of a short study, when further studied in depth, requires some unlearning to take place. The simple can be amplified. The simplistic needs to be corrected. As editors, we believe that the volumes in this series pass that test.

While the specific focus varies, each volume (1) introduces the doctrine, (2) sets it in context, (3) develops it from Scripture, (4) draws the various threads together, and (5) brings it to bear on the Christian life. It is our prayer, then, that this series will assist the church to delight in her triune God by thinking his thoughts—which he has graciously revealed in his written word, which testifies to his living Word, Jesus Christ—after him in the powerful working of his Spirit.

Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin

Introduction

Why I Love Predestination

An advertisement for an energy bar pictures two triumphant climbers at the tip of a mountain peak, basking in the glorious view. The caption over the photo reads, “You’ve never felt more alive. You’ve never felt more insignificant.”¹ Why do we love seeing grandeur and feeling small? Because God made us for God. That’s why I love what the Bible teaches about predestination.

An Invitation to Hike Up a Mountain

When you arduously hike up a mountain, it is satisfying to take in the breathtaking panoramic view at the top. God designed us so that we complete our joy by seeing God’s beauty, savoring him, praising him, and then sharing our joy with others. In this book I invite you to let me share my joy with you. The hike is not easy, but it’s worth it because the view at the top is awe-inspiring. The more you know about God and his ways, the deeper and sweeter will be your praise.

Who Is This Book For?

This book’s target audience is thoughtful Christians—both pastors and laypeople—who want to study what the Bible teaches

1. See Andy Naselli, “God Is Supreme,” *Andy Naselli* (blog) November 6, 2021, <https://andynaselli.com/god-is-supreme>.

about predestination. I wrote it with several types of Christians in mind, including my students at Bethlehem College and Seminary, the members of my church (to whom I preached the gist of this book in four sermons), my wife (a homemaker and homeschooling mom), and my oldest daughter (who was thirteen when I drafted it). My main audience is not professional academics, but I attempt to be academically responsible. I aim to explain a complex topic simply but not simplistically.

What Is Helpful to Know Upfront about Predestination As We Prepare to Study It?

I'll attempt to orient us by answering six questions.

1. What If I Am Anxious or Fearful about Studying Predestination?

My wife, Jenni, was initially anxious about my writing this book. Here is what she wrote after reading a draft of it:

When Andy told me that he was planning to study predestination in order to write his next book, I honestly felt trepidation. I firmly believe and rejoice in the sovereignty of God, but the doctrine of predestination and especially reprobation felt very frightening to me, especially because some people I love are not believers. The thought of digging into that doctrine felt frightening—like digging into a dark hole. I wasn't sure I would like what I found.

But each time I come back to Andy's book, I come away with a completely different emotion. My heart is filled with grateful worship to God. There is nothing in me that caused God to choose me. I am amazed that the God of the universe chose me before the foundation of the world. The doctrine of predestination—rather than frightening me—has changed my heart and caused me to worship and love our good God even more. And that was surprising to me.

Friend, if you think predestination is hard to understand and even harder to treasure, you're not alone. Many Christians have struggled with being assured that they are God's elect. And most of us have loved ones who are rejecting Christ.

If you are anxious or fearful about studying predestination, take courage. All Scripture is God-breathed and “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). That's true for what God says about predestination. These precious truths are gifts from the all-good, all-powerful, all-wise God to humble us, comfort us, and satisfy us with himself.²

Many people avoid talking about predestination or gloss over it or misinterpret it to fit with what they already presuppose. We are born with a self-centered view of the universe instead of a God-centered one. We naturally think, “It's all about me.” We need a Copernican revolution so that our “felt reality” matches reality.³ My goal in this book is to clearly and faithfully explain and apply what God says about predestination.

2. How Should We Talk about Such a Controversial and Emotional Issue?

When I told friends that I was writing a book on predestination—that is, election and reprobation—some would pause long enough for me to read the thought bubble above their heads: “Wow, that's brave. Election is controversial. And reprobation is frightening. That's heavy stuff.”

2. John Calvin, a French pastor-theologian in the 1500s, reminds us that in Scripture “nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.21.3 (924).

3. Joe Rigney, “Submit Your Felt Reality to God,” *Desiring God*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.desiringgod.org/>.

Sometimes Christians passionately disagree with each other about predestination. For many of us, our convictions about predestination are deep. We feel strongly about how to interpret and systematize and apply what the Bible says about predestination.

So how should we talk about an issue that is often controversial and emotional? Carefully, reasonably, charitably, evenhandedly, patiently, humbly, convictionally, straightforwardly, soberly, joyfully.

It is pitiful how we can take a Bible teaching that should result in humility, praise, and comfort and instead talk about it with sinful pride, divisiveness, and anxiety (see table 0.1).

Table 0.1 Two Ways to Respond to Predestination

The Right Way to Respond to Predestination	The Wrong Way to Respond to Predestination
Be humbled.	Be proud.
Praise God.	Be divisive.
Feel comforted.	Feel anxious.

We self-centered sinners routinely rebel against God's brilliant designs. We can turn a blessing into a wicked mess—like indulging in sexual activity outside of marriage or misusing authority to oppress others. Let's not turn the blessing of predestination on its head.

Predestination is a teaching that God has revealed to us for his glory and our good. To talk about predestination in a humble way does not mean that we shrug our shoulders and decline to address it in detail since Christians disagree about it. To talk about predestination in a humble way means that we unreservedly affirm and cherish whatever God has revealed. We must not be embarrassed about what the Bible

teaches. It does not honor God to say, “The Bible teaches that, but I don’t like it,” or, “The Bible says that, but it can’t really mean that.” We do not have the authority to judge what God has revealed. And if we feel the need to apologize for something God has said, then we must repent of our arrogance. If we have a problem understanding the nature and rationale of what God has revealed in Scripture, then the problem is with *us*—not with God’s word.⁴ We must be aware that sin has affected even our thought processes and that we are finite creatures who think we are a lot smarter than we really are. We think we know better than God does, and we don’t like it if we are not in control.

So let’s approach predestination on our knees and with open hands. Let’s not stand *over* the word of God as if we are the judge. Instead, let’s kneel *under* the word of God as humble learners. And let’s be committed to believe and cherish whatever God reveals.

This is the one to whom I will look:
 he who is humble and contrite in spirit
 and trembles at my word. (Isa. 66:2)

3. *What Do Predestination, Election, and Reprobation Mean?*

Predestination may be contentious and alarming for some Christians, but we must not ignore it because it is all over the Bible. The Bible refers to God’s people as “the elect” (Matt. 24:22, 24; 24:31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; 2 Tim. 2:10) and “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33; Titus 1:1). What does that mean?

4. To clarify, (1) the Bible itself is without error, but (2) a human’s *interpretation* of the Bible is not necessarily without error. On interpreting the Bible, see Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017).

When addressing a controversial topic, it is crucial to define key terms clearly. I repeatedly use the words *predestination*, *election*, and *reprobation* in this book, so I will define those keywords here at the beginning.

In the New Testament, *predestine* translates *proōrizō*, which occurs six times (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11). *Proōrizō* means “decide upon beforehand, *predetermine*.”⁵ It is an action that God does. God predetermines whatever takes place (Eph. 1:11; cf. Acts 4:28), and for God to predestine a person means for him to predetermine a person’s destiny.⁶ While it is valid to use *predestination* for everything God decrees,⁷ I am using *predestination* specifically regarding a person’s eternal destiny—similar to what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:9: “God has not *destined* us for wrath, but [God has destined us] for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (NASB).⁸ (See table 0.2.)

5. Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 873 (προορίζω; hereafter cited as BDAG).

6. “Person” includes both humans and angels. Aquinas rightly asserts, “Predestination applies to angels.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: Prima Pars, 1–49*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas 21 (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, 2017), q. 23, a. 1 (254). Angels are either elect (1 Tim. 5:21) or evil (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Cf. C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 42–45. This book focuses on the predestination of humans.

7. E.g., “Predestination and election are not synonyms, although they are closely related. Predestination has to do with God’s decrees concerning anything. A specific type of predestination is election, which has to do with God’s choosing certain people in Christ to be adopted into the family of God, or, in simple terms, to be saved.” R. C. Sproul, *Everyone’s a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2014), 222.

8. Elsewhere (in contrast to the previous footnote), Sproul defines *predestination* the way I do in this book. E.g., “We may define *predestination* broadly as follows: From all eternity God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. God made a choice—he chose certain individuals to be saved unto everlasting blessedness in heaven, and he chose others to pass over, allowing them to suffer the consequences of their sins, eternal punishment in hell.” R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown: The Heart of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 141. See also R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 23.

Table 0.2 Defining *Predestination*, *Election*, and *Reprobation*

Predestination	
God predetermined the destiny of certain individuals for salvation (election) and others for condemnation (reprobation).	
Election	Reprobation
God sovereignly and graciously chose to save individual sinners:	God sovereignly and justly chose to pass over nonelect sinners and punish them:
“vessels of mercy, which [God] has prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom. 9:23) “the elect” (Rom. 11:7) Jesus’s sheep (John 10:27–29)	“vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (Rom. 9:22) “the rest” (Rom. 11:7) not Jesus’s sheep (John 10:26)
positive predestination for eternal life with distinct goals (see chap. 1) in accordance with God’s love, mercy, and grace	negative predestination for eternal death with distinct goals (see chap. 14) in accordance with God’s wrath, power, and justice

Predestination means that *God predetermined the destiny of certain individuals for salvation and others for condemnation*. Predestination has two parts: choosing to save some (election) and choosing not to save others (reprobation).

Election is positive predestination: *God sovereignly and graciously chose to save individual sinners*. God predestined certain individuals (i.e., predetermined their destiny) for salvation.

Reprobation is negative predestination: *God sovereignly and justly chose to pass over nonelect sinners and punish them.*⁹

9. Some theologians label two aspects of God’s decree of reprobation as *preterition* and *precondemnation*. (1) *Preterition* means that God sovereignly and justly chose to pass over nonelect sinners. He did not choose to save certain individual sinners; he chose to leave some sinners to themselves in their sins; he chose to withhold grace. God did not choose to pass over some sinners in the same way that he chose to save some sinners (see chap. 11), and his choice to pass over some sinners is based on his sovereign will (see chap. 7). (2) *Precondemnation* (or *predamnation*) means that God sovereignly and justly chose to hold accountable the sinners he passed over by punishing them. God will

God predestined certain individuals (i.e., predetermined their destiny) for condemnation. (*Proörizō* does not refer specifically to reprobation, but other destine-words do. See 1 Pet. 2:8; cf. Rom. 9:22; Jude 4.) The word *reprobation* does not appear in the Bible, but it is a common label that theologians use for a reality that I believe the Bible teaches.¹⁰

The range of meanings for *election* and (positive) *predestination* overlaps. They can function as synonyms. What distinguishes them is that election emphasizes the *who* and predestination emphasizes the *what*.¹¹ That is, election emphasizes that God chose *us*, and predestination emphasizes what God chose us *for*—“to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29) and “for adoption to himself as sons” (Eph. 1:5). But we should not overemphasize this distinction between the *who* and the *what* because (1) God chose us *for* something—“that we should be holy and blameless” (Eph. 1:4)—and (2) God “predestined *us*” (Eph. 1:5; cf. Rom. 8:29–30). (See table 0.3.)

execute his decree when he righteously condemns people for their sins; hell is what sinners deserve. E.g., see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992–1997), 1:380–82; Peter Sammons, *Reprobation and God’s Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022), 121–27.

10. I offer you the same invitation John Piper does: “I invite you to penetrate through words into reality. *Providence* is a word not found in the Bible. In that sense, it is like the words *Trinity*, *discipleship*, *evangelism*, *exposition*, *counseling*, *ethics*, *politics*, and *charismatics* [and I would add *reprobation*]. People who love the Bible and believe that it is God’s word want to know what the Bible teaches, not just what it says. They want to know the *reality* being presented, not just the *words* that were written. . . . The task of a teacher is not just to read the Bible to his hearers, but to *explain* it. And explaining means using other words besides the ones in the text. Throughout the history of the church, heretics have frequently insisted on using only Bible words in defending their heresy.” John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 15–16; emphasis original.

11. See Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013–2016), 1:112; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 199, 228.

Table 0.3 Distinguishing the Synonyms *Election* and (*Positive*) *Predestination*

Election	(Positive) Predestination
Emphasizes the <i>who</i> : God chose <i>us</i> .	Emphasizes the <i>what</i> : God predestined us <i>for</i> something.
Includes the <i>what</i> : God chose us <i>for</i> something.	Includes the <i>who</i> : God predestined <i>us</i> .

I think “those whom he predestined” (Rom. 8:30) are synonymous with “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33), and I agree with Doug Moo that “chose” and “predestined” are “essentially equivalent” in Ephesians 1:4–5.¹²

In this book I use the terms *predestination*, *election*, and *reprobation* as shorthand for what I believe the Bible teaches. I am not being creative. This is the standard way that Reformed theologians use those three terms. For example, John Calvin explains,

We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.

12. Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 272. A more form-based translation of Ephesians 1:4–5 is “*he chose* us in him before the foundation of the world, . . . *having predestined* us for adoption as sons.” Most translations break up the single sentence of 1:3–14 into several English sentences and begin a new sentence in 1:5. For example, the ESV begins 1:5, “He predestined us.” If the participle *proörizō* (*predestine*) modifies the verb “he chose,” then it is not clear how God’s predestining relates to his choosing—e.g., contemporaneous time (God chose us *when* he predestined us), antecedent time (God chose us *after* he predestined us), means (God chose us *by* predestining us), cause (God chose us *because* he predestined us), manner (God chose us *in a predestining manner*), purpose (God chose us *for the purpose of* predestining us), or result (God chose us *with the result that* he predestined us). I am not convinced that Paul intended to communicate such a precise relation between “he chose” and “having predestined.” I think Paul is using the terms here as synonyms to emphasize God’s sovereign choice. His stylistic variation is similar to saying, “*he loved* us . . . *having cherished* us” or “*she hugged* me . . . *having embraced* me.” The participle (“having predestined us”) restates and emphasizes the main idea (“he chose us”) as Paul continues his prayer of praise, which he intended people to read and hear aloud. He is using a common rhetorical style of his day. See S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 83 (and 62–70).

Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.¹³

Similarly, J. I. Packer explains, “It has become usual in Protestant theology to define God’s predestination as including both his decision to save some from sin (election) and his decision to condemn the rest for their sin (reprobation), side by side.”¹⁴

4. What Are the Two Main Ways Theologians Have Understood Predestination?

If you walk into a room where two people are hours into a deep conversation, it would be responsible and respectful for you to have a basic understanding of what they are talking about before you weigh in on the conversation. As we consider predestination, it is helpful to remember that we are entering a conversation that theologians have been carrying on for centuries, so before we continue that conversation, it would be responsible and respectful to have a basic understanding of what some influential theologians have argued.

Specifically, it would be helpful to be familiar with the two major positions on predestination—commonly called *Arminianism* and *Calvinism*. Those labels are common nicknames or shorthand for different ways of thinking about predestination. Authors have written entire books on how Augustine (354–430) or John Calvin (1509–1564) or Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) or John Wesley (1703–1791) understood election. We are not focusing on historical theology in this book, but we should value it and benefit from it. So let’s get our bearings by surveying the

13. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.5 (926).

14. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 38. Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:332–33; Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 173–74; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 1520.

two main ways theologians have understood predestination in the context of larger theological frameworks.¹⁵

Instead of focusing primarily on Arminius and Calvin, I am focusing on the mainstream teaching in the Arminian and Calvinist traditions without getting sidetracked on intramural debates. Table 0.4 compares Arminianism and Calvinism on six issues.

Table 0.4 Comparing Arminianism and Calvinism

Issue	Arminianism	Calvinism
God's sovereignty	God's sovereignty is general. God is in charge of everything, but he does not ordain everything. For example, God does not ordain sin; he allows sin to preserve man's free will.	God's sovereignty is meticulous. God is in charge of everything, and he ordains everything—even sin.
Man's depravity	As a result of Adam's fall, man is radically depraved and thus cannot repent and believe in Jesus without God's special grace. (God gives that special grace to everyone; Arminians call it prevenient grace.) ^a	As a result of Adam's fall, man is radically depraved and thus cannot repent and believe in Jesus without God's special grace. (God gives that special grace to only some people—the elect; this grace is effective and invincible.)

15. Historical theology typically focuses on four broad periods of church history: (1) the early church (1st c.–600), (2) the Middle Ages (600–1500), (3) the Reformation and post-Reformation (1500–1750), and (4) the modern period (1750–present). For a concise survey of predestination in these four periods, see Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine—A Companion to Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 453–73. See also Peter Sammons, *Reprobation: From Augustine to the Synod of Dort—The Historical Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Reprobation*, Reformed Historical Theology 63 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020); David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *Chosen Not for Good in Me: Unconditional Election in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, forthcoming), esp. chaps. 1–10 (the book title is provisional).

(Table 0.4 continued)

Issue	Arminianism	Calvinism
God's election	God's election is conditional. God chose to save sinners he foresaw would freely choose to believe in Christ.	God's election is unconditional. God sovereignly chose to save individual sinners based on his forelove.
Christ's atonement	The intention of Christ's atonement is general—that is, it provides salvation for all people without exception. Christ's atonement provides payment for the sins of all people, but God applies it to only those who repent and believe (i.e., the elect).	The intention of Christ's atonement is definite—that is, it provides and accomplishes salvation for only the elect. Christ's atonement provides payment for the sins of only the elect, and God applies it to only the elect.
The Spirit's grace and man's will	The Spirit's saving grace is universal and ultimately resistible—that is, every individual receives prevenient grace and can reject it. Man has a free will in the sense that he can make equally alternative choices in the same circumstances. So man is equally free to choose or reject Christ. Theologically, repentance and faith precede and cause regeneration.	The Spirit's saving grace is particular and ultimately irresistible—that is, it is persuasively effective for the elect. Man has a free will in the sense that he chooses what he most wants. The Spirit does not force a man to repent and believe against his will; the Spirit transforms a man's heart with the result that he wants to repent and believe. Theologically, regeneration precedes and causes repentance and faith.
The believer's perseverance	Genuine believers can finally fall away from the faith. They can fail to continue in the faith and thus will not be eternally saved.	Genuine believers (i.e., the elect) cannot finally fall away from the faith. Believers continue in the faith (perseverance) because God preserves them as eternally secure (preservation).

a. On prevenient grace, see the end of chap. 5.

God’s sovereignty (the first issue in table 0.4) is the overarching category.¹⁶ Everything follows from how you define God’s sovereignty. If God’s sovereignty is meticulous and not merely general—that is, if God is in charge of everything and ordains everything—then it follows that God also ordains every human’s eternal destiny. It’s an argument from the greater to the lesser. If I can pick up a refrigerator, then I can pick up a gallon of milk that’s in the refrigerator. If God ordains everything, then he ordains a man’s salvation.

The final five issues in table 0.4 correspond to the popular Calvinist acronym TULIP:

Total depravity
Unconditional election
Limited atonement
Irresistible grace
Perseverance of the saints

The origin of the TULIP acronym is unknown. “The five points of Calvinism” were originally a five-point response to Arminians. In 1610, Arminius’s followers presented a Remonstrance (a written protest) in the Netherlands containing five points that objected to John Calvin’s *Institutes* and arguably to Reformed confessions. The Synod at Dort (1618–1619) unanimously condemned the Remonstrance and responded to it with their own five-point answer, and that five-point structure persists.¹⁷ The popular TULIP acronym is misleading (see table 0.5),¹⁸ but it is so memorable and well-known that Calvinists still use it.

16. This is why some systematic theologies organize predestination under the doctrine of God. Predestination is an aspect of God’s sovereign decree. Other systematic theologies organize predestination under the doctrine of salvation since predestination concerns whom God chose to save. Theological topics are organically connected, and theologians may responsibly address predestination under the doctrine of God or salvation.

17. For a concise and accessible commentary on the Canons of Dort, see Kevin DeYoung, *Grace Defined and Defended: What a 400-Year-Old Confession Teaches Us about Sin, Salvation, and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

18. Cf. Roger Nicole, “Calvinism: The Five Points,” 1974; repr., *Reformed Faith and Practice* 1 (2016): 62–68; Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths About Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011),

Table 0.5 How TULIP Is Misleading

TULIP	More Accurate (Less Misleading)	Explanation
Total depravity	Man's pervasive corruption	<i>Total</i> may sound like <i>absolute</i> or <i>utter</i> . The point is not depravity's <i>depth</i> (as if every person is as wicked as he possibly can be) but depravity's <i>breadth</i> . Every aspect of a person is corrupt. Man is radically (i.e., at the <i>root</i>) corrupted in the sense that evil pollutes his whole being—body, will, mind, conscience, etc. The corruption is all-pervasive—like salt permeating sea water or chlorine permeating pool water. Pervasive (or radical) corruption describes man's condition, and total inability describes the result of that condition. That is, unregenerate man cannot repent and believe in Jesus apart from God's special grace.
Unconditional election	The Father's sovereign election	<i>Unconditional</i> may sound like <i>arbitrary</i> —as if God the Father selected individuals randomly and whimsically (e.g., flipping a coin or picking names out of a hat). The point is that before God created the world he sovereignly chose to save specific individuals by name without basing his choice on any human conditions. The all-wise God has reasons for everything he does, and we don't know what all of them are.
Limited atonement	Christ's definite atonement	<i>Limited</i> may sound like <i>tiny</i> , <i>weak</i> , <i>sparse</i> , <i>defective</i> . But Christ's atonement is global, powerful, lavish, perfect. The point is that Christ did not die for everyone in the same way. Christ definitively provided and accomplished redemption for particular individuals—the same individuals whom the Father elected (sovereign election) and whom the Spirit regenerates (effective grace). The members of the triune God do not work contrary to each other but in a unified way to accomplish the same goals.

TULIP	More Accurate (Less Misleading)	Explanation
Irresistible grace	The Spirit's effective grace	<p><i>Irresistible</i> may sound like what a robber does (<i>attack, force, steal</i>) or what a prostitute does (<i>tempt, allure, seduce</i>). Further, <i>irresistible</i> may sound like it is <i>impossible to resist</i> God's grace. Of course, it is possible to resist God's grace (Acts 7:51). The point is that it is impossible to <i>ultimately</i> resist God's special saving grace. It's effective (i.e., it successfully produces the result that God intends) because it's invincible (i.e., it's too powerful to defeat or overcome). When God's Spirit causes a man to be born again, he gives spiritual life to a man who was spiritually dead; he changes that man's heart by effectively calling him so that he willingly (not reluctantly or protestingly) comes to Christ. Regeneration is not a joint effort in which the Spirit contributes his part and we contribute ours; the Spirit's effective grace is entirely one-sided—like when Jesus cried, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43).</p>
Perseverance of the saints	God's preservation of the saints	<p><i>Perseverance</i> may sound like a believer's activity is the key. The point is that believers persevere <i>because God preserves them</i>. (Those who claim to be neither Calvinists nor Arminians typically like this teaching—or at least a truncated version of it: “Once saved, always saved.”) We work out our salvation because God works in us the willing and the working (Phil. 2:12–13).</p>

TULIP presents a logical order according to Calvinism:

- It starts with man’s desperate need to be saved (T), and the rest explains how God saves his people.
- God the Father chose to save specific individuals without basing his choice on the condition of faith (U).
- God the Son atoned particularly for those individuals the Father chose to save (L).
- God the Spirit effectively calls them to himself (I).
- God enables them to persevere until they die or Christ returns (P).

J. I. Packer summarizes Calvinism in three words: “*God saves sinners.*”¹⁹

This introductory chapter to a concise book on predestination is not the place to explain in depth the complexities and nuances of Arminianism and Calvinism. Many other resources helpfully argue for Arminianism²⁰ or for Calvinism.²¹ The purpose of this short survey is to orient us to how predestination is part of larger frameworks for understanding

75–98, 291–92; Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 58–62; Douglas Wilson, “Triune Grace – Douglas Wilson | Reformed Basics #6,” Christ Church, February 2, 2021, YouTube Video <https://www.youtube.com/>.

19. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 130; emphasis original. Cf. Jonah 2:9: “Salvation belongs to the LORD.”

20. E.g., Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006); Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Randall House, 2011); J. Matthew Pinson, *40 Questions about Arminianism*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022).

21. E.g., Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995); Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); John Piper, *Five Points: Toward a Deeper Experience of God’s Grace*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor, 14 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 8:543–620; Shawn D. Wright, *40 Questions about Calvinism*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019); Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2020).

how God saves sinners. Arminians and Calvinists agree on many evangelical doctrines, but they fundamentally differ on predestination.

You have probably figured it out by now, but I'll say it in case you are still wondering: I am a Calvinist. I use the term *Calvinism* as theological shorthand. I do not follow John Calvin in a proud or partisan way (see 1 Cor. 1:12) or in every way, but I am convinced that Calvinism faithfully expresses what the Bible teaches. My goal in this book is not to explain and defend what *John Calvin* wrote about predestination—though I essentially agree with him.²² My goal is to explain and defend what *the Bible* teaches about predestination.

5. How Important Is Predestination?

Some Bible teachings are more important than other Bible teachings. Paul writes, “I delivered to you as of *first importance* what I also received” (1 Cor. 15:3). “First importance” implies that although everything in the Bible is important, not everything is *equally* important. Some doctrines are *more* important than others. That is why Jesus could refer to “the weightier matters of the law” (Matt. 23:23). We can distinguish at least three levels of importance (see table 0.6).²³

22. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21–24 (920–87). Cf. Fred H. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977); Donald Sinnema, “Calvin's View of Reprobation,” in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 115–36; Joel R. Beeke, “Calvin on Sovereignty, Providence, and Predestination,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no. 2 (2010): 77–105; Beeke, *Debated Issues in Sovereign Predestination: Early Lutheran Predestination, Calvinian Reprobation, and Variations in Genevan Lapsarianism*, Reformed Historical Theology 42 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 83–162; Paul Helm, “Predestination,” in *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*, ed. Derek W. H. Thomas and John W. Tweeddale (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 449–70; David Gibson, “Mercy on Every Side: Calvin's Misunderstood Doctrine of Election,” *Desiring God*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/>.

23. On distinguishing the importance of Bible teachings, see R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Albert Mohler* (blog), July 12, 2005, <https://albertmohler.com/>. Cf. Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 295–96.

Table 0.6 Three Levels of Predestination's Importance

Level	Labels			
1	First-level issues	Essential for the Christian faith	Dogma	Fundamental teachings
2	Second-level issues	Crucial for church health but not essential for the Christian faith	Doctrine	Denominational distinctives
3	Third-level issues	Important but not essential for the Christian faith or crucial for church health	Disputable matters	Matters of conscience

You do not have to affirm the Calvinist view of predestination in order to be a Christian (level 1). But predestination is not merely a matter of conscience (level 3). I think affirming the Bible's teaching on predestination is crucial for a church to be robustly healthy (level 2).

My church has two statements of faith—one that the pastors (also called elders) affirm and one that the members affirm. The Elder Affirmation of Faith upholds Calvinism (without using that word), and the Member Affirmation of Faith upholds basic Christianity (plus credobaptism). An Arminian may be a *member* of our church but not a *pastor* of our church, and members know that our church teaches in accord with the Elder Affirmation of Faith. We think it is crucial that our pastors and other teachers be aligned on predestination because it directly affects how we make disciples. It affects what and how we preach and teach and sing and pray and counsel.

6. How Will We Explore What the Bible Teaches about Predestination?

This book attempts to answer specific questions regarding what the Bible teaches about predestination. Part 1 addresses election (chaps. 1–10), and part 2 addresses reprobation (chaps. 11–15):

1. What is the goal of election?
2. When did God choose to save some humans?
3. Did God choose to save individuals?
4. Did God choose to save individuals based on foreseen faith?
5. Is unconditional election unfair?
6. Do we have free will?
7. Does election contradict God's desire that all humans be saved?
8. How does God accomplish his plan to save individuals?
9. How do I know if God has elected me?
10. Did God elect babies who die?
11. Who ultimately causes reprobation?
12. How does God accomplish reprobation?
13. What is the result of reprobation?
14. What is the goal of reprobation?
15. Who deserves blame for reprobation?

I crafted and arranged these questions as I studied what the Bible teaches about predestination. This is my attempt to synthesize and organize both what the Bible explicitly teaches and what we may reasonably infer.²⁴ Such correlating or systematizing is doing systematic theology.²⁵

24. I am approaching predestination both inductively and deductively. I ask questions in all the chapter titles and then explore the answers (inductive), and I summarize what I have inductively discovered by making assertions and supporting them with Bible passages (deductive). In my research I began with questions and Bible passages and then let those passages lead to answers, but this book would be at least three times longer if I argued entirely inductively.

25. On my theological method, see Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*; Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2020). Cf. Layton Talbert, "Levels of Systematic Theology and the Role of Logic," *Journal of Biblical Theology and Worldview* 1, no. 2 (2021): 4–22.

PART 1

Vessels of Mercy

What Does the Bible Teach about Election?

A man is drowning in the ocean, and a lifeguard saves him with his paddle board.

A toddler is trapped in her burning home, and a fireman saves her by cradling her in his arms as he rushes through the flames and smoke.

A pregnant woman's infant son has the umbilical cord wrapped tightly around his neck, and a doctor saves him with an emergency C-section.

An American woman is held hostage by a terrorist, and a Navy SEAL rescues her.

To save a person means to rescue that person from harm or danger.

The ultimate danger is eternal punishment for rebelling against God. That is what we deserve in order for justice to be served. In this life we protest against injustice because we deeply desire that justice be served. God is just, so he punishes all sin perfectly and completely. And *God sovereignly and graciously chose to save individuals*. The Bible calls that *election*.

What Is the Goal of Election?

Why begin with the *goal* of election? Because we can better understand what we see if we know what the goal is. I can better understand why men are using dynamite to blow up part of a mountain if I know that their goal is to build a tunnel for a highway through that part of the mountain. If I did not understand their goal, I would not understand the reason for the explosions. Similarly, if we understand God's goal for election, then we can better understand what happens that leads to that goal.¹

But it is rather difficult to summarize only one goal for election. My favorite tweet by John Piper explains why: "God never does only one thing. In everything he does he is doing thousands of things. Of these we know perhaps half a dozen."² That is about how many goals of election God has revealed to us in

1. Cf. John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 24.

2. John Piper (@JohnPiper), Twitter, December 18, 2009, 1:01 p.m., <https://twitter.com/JohnPiper/status/6803509843>.

Scripture. I'll attempt to summarize them in a single statement after we work through them.

Election has a reputation for being impractical, esoteric, divisive, and scary. But that is not how God talks about election. God has revealed at least eight of his overlapping goals of election. The first six goals are different ways of saying that God's goal is *to save us*; the final two goals are negative and positive ways of expressing that the ultimate goal of election is *to praise God's glorious grace*.

Goal 1: To Save Us on the Day of the Lord

Paul thanks God that he chose to save the Thessalonian believers: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits *to be saved*, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). God chose us “for salvation” (NASB, CSB, NET)—that is, to save us from our sins and the judgment we deserve. In the context of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, this salvation likely refers to when God saves us on the day of the Lord (cf. 1 Thess. 2:16; 5:8–10; 2 Thess. 2:10).³ The day of the Lord is when God will decisively judge and defeat his enemies and deliver and vindicate his people.

Practical application. Election encourages us that God loves us and that our future salvation on judgment day depends on God's choice, not our effort. We are “beloved by the Lord” (2 Thess. 2:13). God will not finally deliver and vindicate us as a result of our earning his favor. God will finally deliver and vindicate us because he chose us. God chose us in order to save us.

3. Cf. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 551.

Goal 2: That We Should Be Holy and Blameless

Paul praises God because “he [God the Father] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless before him*” (Eph. 1:4). One goal of election is that when we stand before God we will be morally pure and blameless.

“Blameless” recalls Old Testament sacrifices of animals “without blemish” (e.g., Lev. 4:3, 23, 28, 32) and Christ’s ultimate substitutionary sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19). For us to be holy and blameless is a goal of election in that God not only frees us from sin’s penalty and enslaving power but also will ultimately free us from sin’s very presence in our hearts (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22; Phil. 1:9; 1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 24). Christ plans to “present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be *holy and without blemish*” (Eph. 5:27; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7–8).⁴

Practical application. Election encourages us that we will be holy and blameless before God. Can you imagine what it will be like to be completely free from our sins? We can praise God now for this glorious work he will do.

Election also motivates us to be holy and blameless now. The New Testament portrays God’s saving and sanctifying work with three tenses:

- You have been saved (past). You are being saved (present). You will be saved (future).
- You have been sanctified (past). You are being sanctified (present). You will be sanctified (future).

Sometimes God reasons that you must *become what you are*: you are holy, so become holy (e.g., Rom. 6:13; 1 Cor. 5:7;

4. “Holy and without blemish” in Ephesians 5:27 translates the same words that “holy and blameless” translate in 1:4.

6:11, 17). Sometimes God reasons that you must *become what you will be*: you will be holy, so become holy. Ephesians 1:4 fits here. God chose us so that at the day of Christ we would be holy and blameless. That implies that we should become increasingly holy and blameless now (cf. Phil. 2:15). We are no longer in bondage to sin's enslaving power (Rom. 6), and we must put our sin to death (Col. 3).

Goal 3: To Be Conformed to the Image of God's Son

“Those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined *to be conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he [the Son] might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). One goal of election is to conform us to the “image” or likeness or appearance of God's Son. It includes our moral character and our physical bodies. We currently have bodies like Adam's natural, earthy body, but when Christ returns, our bodies will be like Christ's supernatural, heavenly body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45–49). Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

Practical application. Election encourages us that we will be conformed to the image of God's Son. Election also motivates us to be conformed to the image of God's Son now. We must live in the present in light of the future. Because we know that God will conform us to the image of his Son, we should be and behave like the Son now (cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16–5:9; Col. 3:10).

Goal 4: For Adoption as Sons to God

Paul praises God because “in love he predestined us *for adoption to himself as sons* through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:4–5). One goal for election is for our adoption as sons to God.

The phrase “for adoption . . . as sons” translates a single Greek word that refers to “those who believe in Christ and are

accepted by God as God's children . . . with full rights."⁵ In its Greco-Roman context, this custom guaranteed that an adopted son had all the rights and privileges of a natural-born son. A man who headed a household would adopt a male not related by blood and become his father just as if the boy were his biological son.⁶ That beautifully pictures what God did for us when we were "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:2, 3). God has legally adopted us (Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:5–7), and we await the culmination of that adoption when God will redeem our bodies (Rom. 8:23).

One of the privileges of adoption to sonship is that we become heirs (Rom. 8:17; cf. Gal. 3:29; 4:7). We obtain an inheritance. That is likely what Paul highlights in Ephesians 1:11: "*In him we have obtained an inheritance*, having been [because we were (CSB)] predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."⁷ If we become heirs *because* God predestined us, then a goal of predestination is that we become heirs. But what do we inherit? It is not clear in Ephesians 1:11, 14, or 18. But 5:5 suggests that

5. BDAG 1024 (υιοθεσία).

6. Does this adoption *as sons* exclude females? No. That is why some translations say "adoption as sons *and daughters*" (NASB) or "adopt us as his children" (NIRV) or "adopt us into his own family" (NLT). But those translations fail to capture that Paul is referring to a Greco-Roman practice in which the head of a household adopted a male as his son with all the rights that a natural-born son would have. Sons had the privilege of inheriting property. Sonship language (and not merely *children* language, as Paul uses in Rom. 8:16–17) also preserves the "sons-in-the-Son" solidarity that shapes Pauline theology." David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016), 52. In this adoption metaphor, women get to be *sons*, just as in the marriage metaphor, men get to be a *bride* (Eph. 5:22–32). On how the background for Paul's adoption metaphor includes both Greco-Roman adoption and Israelite divine sonship, see Joshua A. Maurer, "Adoption in Romans: Destined to Be Conformed to the Image of His Son" (Wheaton College, PhD diss., 2022), 44–126.

7. I say "likely" because "we have obtained an inheritance" could instead mean something like "we were allotted to God as his portion" in the sense that "we are God's inheritance" or "we were also chosen" (NIV). But that is less likely because this sentence (Eph. 1:3–14) later distinguishes us from the inheritance: the Holy Spirit is "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (1:14). See Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 72–73.

the inheritance is God’s end-time kingdom: “Everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no *inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God*” (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21). More specifically, the inheritance is God himself: “we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—*heirs of God* and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:16–17). God chose us *for himself*. God chose us *for God*.⁸

Practical application. Election encourages us that we are secure as sons who belong to God. We deeply long to belong—to be loved, to have a home, to be part of a family, to be part of something great and meaningful. What ultimately satisfies that desire is being adopted as a son of God. That is what God predestined us for.

Goal 5: To Obey the Gospel and Be Sprinkled with Christ’s Blood

Peter addresses his first letter, “*To those who are elect* exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, *for obedience* to Jesus Christ and *for sprinkling with his blood*” (1 Pet. 1:1–2). A more form-based translation of those final two phrases is “for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”⁹ In other words, Peter describes the purpose of election with two phrases: “[1] to be obedient and [2] to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ” (CSB). To be elect for *obedience* and *sprinkling* most

8. Cf. Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 22 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 98.

9. Form-based Bible translations prioritize reproducing the form of the Hebrew or Greek in English (e.g., NASB, ESV). Another approach prioritizes reproducing the meaning in natural English (e.g., NLT). Cf. Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 50–81.

likely refers to the moment of conversion when (1) the Spirit enables a sinner to obey the gospel—to repent and believe in Christ—and (2) Christ cleanses and forgives the repenting and believing sinner. The Old Testament background is that Israelites entered the old covenant by pledging to obey God and were sprinkled with blood from burnt offerings (Ex. 24:3–8). Similarly, we enter the new covenant by obeying the gospel and are sprinkled with Christ’s blood (cf. Heb. 10:22; 12:24).¹⁰ So one goal of election is that we would obey the gospel and be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ—that is, for our *conversion* and *forgiveness*.

Practical application. Election encourages us that our conversion and forgiveness depend on God’s choice, not our effort. God does not convert and cleanse us as a result of our earning his favor. God converts and cleanses us because he chose us; that is, he chose us in order to convert and cleanse us.

Goal 6: That We May Be with Jesus to See His Glory

Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, *may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me* because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Jesus does not say, “The Father *chose* you so that you may be with me to see my glory.” So what is my warrant for saying that one goal of *election* is that we may be with Jesus to see his glory? My warrant is twofold:

1. The people whom the Father gave the Son refers to those whom the Father chose (i.e., the elect).¹¹ Jesus repeatedly (and exclusively) prays for them here (17:2, 6–9, 20, 24). The reason

10. See D. A. Carson, “1 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1016–17; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude*, 2nd ed., Christian Standard Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 51–54.

11. Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 569.

people come to Jesus is that the Father previously gave them to Jesus (6:37, 39, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; 18:9).

2. There is a logical connection between the people the Father gave Jesus (i.e., the elect) and being with Jesus. Imagine that my mom said to me, “Andy, I desire that my grandchildren, whom you have driven to South Carolina, may be with me at my home to spend time with me.” (Okay, she wouldn’t say it just like that, but work with me—I’m trying to parallel John 17:24.) In other words, one of my goals for driving my daughters to South Carolina is that they may be with Grandma to enjoy her presence. Similarly, one of the goals for the Father’s giving the elect to Jesus is that they may be with Jesus to see his glory. That is what makes the new heavens and the new earth supremely pleasurable. You get to be with Jesus when you “enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:23).

John Piper asks a piercing question:

If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there?¹²

The gospel is good news not merely because God will rescue us from hell and because we can enjoy the pleasures of heaven. It is good news ultimately because we can enjoy God himself like we never could in our shackles of sin. The new heavens and new earth will be so satisfying because we get to enjoy the triune God more and more. Forever!

12. John Piper, *God Is the Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love as the Gift of Himself*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor, 14 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 6:262.

Practical application. Election exhilarates us that we will be with Jesus to see his glory. Nothing could be more happy, more satisfying, more awesome, more wonderful than being with the exalted Jesus. And King Jesus wants us to be with him so that we will see his glory that the Father has given him. We love to see the glory of places on this earth (my favorites include the Sunset Cliffs in San Diego, California; the Grand Canyon in Arizona; the Rocky Mountains in Colorado; and the North Shore in Minnesota). We love to marvel at beauty and grandeur. The most beautiful and grandest marvel we can imagine on earth or in outer space is but a shadow compared to the glory of the exalted King Jesus. We get to be with King Jesus to see his glory because God chose us.

Goal 7: To Shame the Mighty So That No Human Might Boast¹³

Paul tells the Corinthians (note the ABC-ABC pattern),

Consider your calling, brothers:

[a] not many of you were wise according to worldly standards,

[b] not many were powerful,

[c] not many were of noble birth.

[a'] But God *chose* what is foolish in the world *to shame the wise*;

[b'] God *chose* what is weak in the world *to shame the strong*;

[c'] God *chose* what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to *nothing things that are, so that no human being*

13. This section updates Andrew David Naselli, "1 Corinthians," in *Romans–Galatians*, vol. 10 of *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 235.

might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:26–29)

Paul says three times: “God chose . . . God chose . . . God chose.” God sovereignly chose people in such a way that he enables them to believe and ensures that they do.

God chose mostly low-status people—not the mighty. When God sovereignly called the Corinthian believers, most of them were uneducated, noninfluential, and socially disdained—not the wise, influential, or highborn whom the worldly wise people would expect (cf. James 2:5).

For what purpose did God choose mostly low-status people? To shame, confound, and invalidate the mighty: the wise, influential, and highborn. This is how God has chosen his people throughout history—for example, by skipping the patriarchs’ firstborns and by selecting Israel (Deut. 7:6–8; 9:4–6).

For what purpose did God choose mostly low-status people to shame, confound, and invalidate the mighty? “So that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:29). God chose mostly low-status people so that the elect cannot boast in themselves. If God chose primarily the mighty, they might proudly presume that God had chosen them because of their high status.

Practical application. Election humbles us so that we cannot boast that God chose us because of our status or accomplishments or character or abilities. God did not choose us because we earned his favor. Election is 100 percent a gracious gift from God. “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this [being saved by grace through faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, *so that no one may boast*” (Eph. 2:8–9). This illustrates the principle in 1 Corinthians 4:7: “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

If God chose you, then don't boast that you somehow earned your salvation.

Goal 8: To Praise God's Glorious Grace and God's Glory

When you think of reasons to praise God for blessing you in Christ with every spiritual blessing, what comes to mind? You might reply, "God forgives my sins, declares me to be righteous, and redeems me." You should certainly praise God for those spiritual blessings. But how often do we think about praising God for choosing to save us? That is the very first blessing Paul specifies in his opening prayer in Ephesians 1:3–14: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (1:3). What is the evidence—the first specific basis—that Paul gives for praising God for blessing us in Christ? "Even as [for (NIV, CSB, NET)] *he chose us* in him before the foundation of the world" (1:4a). Praise God *because* he chose us.

Of the many goals for election, this one is *ultimate*:

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4b–6; cf. 2:7)

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, *so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory*. (Eph. 1:11–12)

A more form-based translation of the first part of 1:6 is "to the praise of the glory of the grace of him." The word "glory" probably describes "grace," which is why translations say

“glorious grace” (ESV, NIV, CSB, NLT).¹⁴ God’s grace (i.e., his undeserved kindness) is glorious in that it manifests his glory. What is God’s glory in this sense? God’s *holiness* is his God-ness (there is no one like him!), and God’s *glory* is his holiness on display. God’s holiness is who God is, and God’s glory displays who God is (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4–6).¹⁵ God predestined us so that we would “be to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:12).

God designed us to praise him, and he designed us to get a satisfying delight in praising him. We most glorify God when he most satisfies us.¹⁶ This is what God made us for. God’s ultimate goal for choosing to save us is so that we would praise his glorious grace and praise his glory. If you did something for the ultimate goal that others would praise you, you would be conceited. Only God can do this without being a megalomaniac because only God is intrinsically praiseworthy. It is actually *loving* for God to pursue our praise because praising God brings us the most joy.¹⁷

Above we considered the goal of election that we be conformed to the image of God’s Son. What is the purpose of that goal? “Those whom he [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, *in order that he* [the Son] *might be the firstborn among many brothers*” (Rom. 8:29). The

14. I hope that is the correct reading because my wife and I named our second daughter Gloria Grace based on this passage!

15. Or one could say that God’s glory is both intrinsic (i.e., the essence of God) and extrinsic (i.e., God displays his intrinsic glory). See Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *The Glory of God and Paul: Text, Themes and Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 58 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 9–13. It is challenging to define God’s glory because Scripture speaks of God’s glory in at least seven distinct senses (5–8).

16. See the works of John Piper, especially his signature book, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 4th ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2011).

17. See John Piper, “Why God Is Not a Megalomaniac in Demanding to Be Worshiped,” *Desiring God*, November 20, 2008, <https://www.desiringgod.org/>; Sam Storms, “Praise: The Consummation of Joy,” *Desiring God*, November 17, 2013, <https://www.desiringgod.org/>; Walter J. Schultz, “Jonathan Edwards’ Argument That God’s End in Creation Must Manifest His Supreme Self-Regard,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 81–103; Piper, *Providence*, 39–45, 53–56.

purpose of conforming us to the image of God's Son is that the Son will be "the firstborn"—that is, the first and most honored among God's resurrected children.

Practical application. Election motivates us to praise God's glorious grace and God's glory. That is the ultimate goal for which God chose us: "You are *a chosen race*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9–10). Ultimately, there are only two human races: the human race in Adam and the "chosen race" (cf. Isa. 43:21) in Christ.¹⁸ God's ultimate goal for choosing us is that we would proclaim his excellencies—that is, that we would praise him. "From him [source] and through him [means] and to him [goal] are all things"; therefore, "To him be glory forever" (Rom. 11:36). "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1). The goal of election is for God to save us so that we praise him for his glorious grace.

Responding with a Prayer

We praise you, Father, because you chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before you. We praise you because you predestined us for adoption to yourself as sons through Jesus Christ to the praise of your glorious grace. Amen.

18. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, "What the Bible Teaches about Ethnic Harmony," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 19, no. 2 (2020): 21–24.