

CHAPTER 12.

ELECTION: GOD'S DECISION TO ADOPT

Laura did not grow up in a Christian home. However, she did live next to a Christian family, the Wilsons. Much to Laura's delight, the Wilsons had a girl that was exactly the same age as she was. Her name was Jane. Laura and Jane spent a lot of time together, dressing up dolls and building play forts. Whenever Laura had a meal at Jane's place, something happened that was new to her: the Wilsons read from the Bible, prayed, and even sang a song about God together. Even though it was unfamiliar to her, Laura liked it, especially when she learned some of the songs and could sing along.

As the girls grew up together, Laura started to ask Jane some questions. Where does God live? What is he like? Who is Jesus? And why do you pray so often for your sins to be forgiven? Jane did her best to answer, and Jane's Mom helped out when her friend's questions became too hard. For a few summers Laura also came to the Vacation Bible School at Jane's church. She enjoyed it, and it generated even more questions in her mind. On some Sundays she would also go to church with Jane's family. She did not comprehend everything the minister said, but she could follow the main lines, and it encouraged her. At a minimum she understood that believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ made things right between God and sinners, including herself, and she liked the idea that all would be well between God and her.

Laura's parents were not opposed to her interest in the Christian faith, but they did not encourage it either. As Laura's Dad always said, "Religion is a matter of personal choice. People have to make up their own minds about whether they want to be religious or not. And the same goes for you, Laura." Well, years later, when she was sixteen, Laura did make up her own mind. She announced to her parents that she wanted to join Jane's church. True to his word, Laura's Dad responded, "That's OK, my girl; you're old enough to make up your own mind about religion. And the Wilsons are a nice family. Just don't expect your mother and me to come along with you." Inwardly Laura was saddened that her parents showed no interest in "religion," as her Dad called it, but she was glad they did not stop her from joining Jane's church.

Joining Jane's church meant learning more about the Bible from Jane's pastor. Once a week Laura, as well as an interested couple, sat down with the pastor and learned all kinds of things about what God teaches in Holy Scripture. One evening they were introduced to something Jane had never heard of before. It was called *election*, or sometimes *predestination*. It was not an easy lesson, but the big picture was clear enough. The pastor said that even before the world and human beings were created, God had already chosen the people whom he wanted to save and adopt as his own children in Jesus Christ.

Curious as always, Laura had her questions about election. She asked the pastor, "If God decided to save me before the creation of the world, how come it does not feel like it happened that way? I was the one who decided to become a Christian. I remember it very well. I prayed about it, even though I was not quite sure how to pray or what words to use. But I prayed anyway. And I kept going back and forth in my mind. Finally, one day I decided that I would do it. I told my parents. And Jane helped me get into your New to the Reformed Faith class. So why does the Bible say that God decided, when I feel like I decided?" That's a good question. And Laura had another one as well. She also asked, "If God decided to save some people before he even created any human beings, doesn't that turn us more or less into robots? God programs us either for salvation or for condemnation. And, in the end, all we're doing is acting out

what God has programmed us to do. Does God really want to turn us into robots?” That is also a good question.

Especially considering Laura’s personal, spiritual journey, you can understand the questions that she had. In fact, the doctrine of election disquiets people in other ways too. They may be concerned that teaching about predestination will inevitably lead to lazy and careless Christians. After all, if an elect person is assured of his eternal salvation, why not go ahead and live today as the sinful heart desires? Election would appear to undermine the incentive for resisting temptation and striving after holiness.

Another common and perhaps more forceful objection to the doctrine of election is that it just does not seem fair. If even before the creation of the world God had already chosen some unto eternal salvation, while decreeing that others would be eternally condemned, then the reprobate, as the non-elect are called, never even have a chance. At least, that is the impression that people have. Before they could consciously make an informed decision, before they even had a chance to listen to the gospel, indeed, before they took their first breath of air, the fate of the reprobate was already sealed by God’s decree. Somehow that just does not seem fair. But as we hope to see in this chapter, these questions, concerns, and objections begin to fade away if we pay close attention to what God himself says about this doctrine.

ELECTION IS IN THE BIBLE

It is perfectly understandable that people have questions about the doctrine of election. However, all the questions in the world will not change the fact that this teaching is found in the Bible, and that is where we must begin.

Three well-known passages clearly demonstrate that it is biblical to believe in election. The first is Romans 8:29–30: “For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also

justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” God foreknew, or knew ahead of time, those whom he had predestined to final glory. He also planned what was necessary to bring them to that glory, such as their calling and their justification.

The second passage is Ephesians 1:4–5: “He chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” This passage teaches that God’s choice took place before the creation of the world. It also reveals that the basis of election is found in God, in *his* pleasure and will.

This same truth is confirmed in a third passage, 2 Timothy 1:9–10. There we read that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” Especially that last phrase underlines that God’s gracious plan of salvation was not an afterthought, formed in God’s mind subsequent to the fall into sin. Rather it was securely there, in a divine decree, even before the beginning of time.

Considered together, these three passages make it quite clear that already in eternity God had a plan in which he made a sovereign choice to pluck some sinners from the punishment into which they would plunge themselves and, instead, to bless them as his own children. This revealed truth also fits with God’s perfections and his name (see chapter 5). Since he is the almighty, eternal, and wise God, we would expect that he has a clear and comprehensive plan for all things, which we commonly call providence. But then we would also, and even especially, expect that he would have a clear plan for his central work of salvation. This is what we commonly call election. Furthermore, since God is the great I AM WHO I AM, we are not surprised to hear that just as he planned salvation before the creation of the world, so he will also bring that plan to fruition in final glory. I AM WHO I AM is the God of consistency. He does what he decrees.

So, if election is revealed in Scripture and it fits with God's name and perfections, we have every reason to affirm it in faith. Still, we have to be sensitive to the questions and objections that can arise concerning this doctrine. How do we do so?

BE QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK

The title of this section is taken from James 1:19. There the apostle writes, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Of course, in the first place this text instructs us about how we speak to, or about, other people. At the same time, what applies in our communication with each other, also applies in a certain way to doing theology. Sometimes we hear about a certain teaching, such as election, and we are quick to voice all kinds of questions and objections. However, have we first listened to the Lord? Do we rightly understand what election is, where and how it is revealed, and why God teaches us about it? Truth be told, we are often guilty of being quick to speak and slow to listen, also in theology. However, our goal is to turn that around and listen to the Lord first.

If we start at the beginning, in Genesis 1, it is striking that the Lord does not say anything about the doctrine of election. Many details concerning his creative work are given, but there is not even one word regarding predestination. Logically and chronologically, Genesis 1 seems to be an entirely appropriate place for the Lord to begin speaking about predestination. After all, God made this decree "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). Therefore, theoretically, the LORD could have included a few verses, or even a chapter, prior to Genesis 1:1, outlining the basic contents of his eternal decree, including both election and reprobation. Remarkably, though, there is no Genesis 0. The starting point of God's revelation is, most clearly, creation, not election.

After speaking about creation in Genesis 1–2, the LORD teaches us about the fall into sin and its immediate consequences in Genesis 3–5. Still, in these chapters there is nothing about election. This same pattern continues in Genesis 6–17. We learn about the Flood, God's covenant with Noah and his family, and the covenant the LORD made with Abraham

and his descendants (Gen 15, 17). In fact, it is not until Genesis 18:19 that we hear the first hint of God's ways in election. There the LORD says concerning Abraham, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice."

Still, Genesis 18:19 is not much more than a hint about election. Actually, it is not until the book of Deuteronomy that some significant details concerning God's choosing are revealed. In Deuteronomy 7:7, 8 we learn the following from Moses:

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

These verses reveal that the basis for the LORD'S choice of his people did not lie in the people themselves—not in how numerous they were, let alone how good they were (Deut 6:17). Rather, he chose them because of what lies within himself: his loyal love. However, even this revelation is limited, for it is about God's choice to redeem the Israelites out of their earthly misery as slaves in Egypt. Strictly speaking, the LORD is not yet teaching us about election unto eternal salvation. He is speaking about choosing a certain group of people to be his covenant people. The revelation of God's eternal decree unto final salvation does not strongly come to the fore until the New Testament. Jesus Christ speaks of God's elect who will be spared on the final day of judgment (Mark 13:20, 27). The apostle Paul, though, is the one who deals with this doctrine most elaborately, writing such key passages as Romans 8–11 and Ephesians 1.

Clearly, the LORD does not avoid this doctrine, but he does purposefully delay his revelation of it. We learn about creation, the fall into sin, and the beginning work of redemption, and then—only then—do we slowly begin to hear about the God who elects. As the Most Wise Teacher, the LORD our God not only knows what we should learn; he also knows

the order in which we should learn it. There is definite progress in divine revelation. It is true, chronologically speaking, that election precedes creation and the fall into sin. However, pedagogically speaking, we should begin with creation and the fall and then include election as part of God's saving work. Also, since the LORD teaches us about his covenant (Gen 6, 15, 17) before election, we should be careful that we do not let election dominate our understanding of the covenant, but rather understand election within the context of the covenant. (If you are eager for more on this particular topic, note that we will look at election and covenant in detail at the end of this chapter.)

The Belgic Confession is careful to follow this order. The doctrine of creation and providence is confessed in Articles 12–14. The truth of our fall into sin is dealt with in Articles 14–15. Then, in Articles 16–17, we learn about election in connection with the rescue of fallen man. Likewise, the Canons of Dort are also diligent about speaking about election after confessing the fall into sin. It is noteworthy that each of the five chapters of the Canons of Dort starts with some aspect of our sinfulness (CoD 1.1; 2.1; 3/4.1–5; 5.1–2, 4–5). Following this confessional and wise approach, this book is structured in a similar way. The doctrines of creation and providence (chapters 7–9), sin (chapter 10), and covenant (chapter 11) all precede this present chapter concerning God's election.

Why is this important? In short, if we make election the starting point of our thinking and our theology, we will inevitably run into some of the problems and objections that were mentioned in the introduction. To give one example, if you immediately begin by thinking that God chose some to be saved and others to be condemned, then it will not be long before your mind begins to protest: that's not fair; why some and not others? However, now let us follow the order in which God teaches us. First, we work through the doctrine of creation and stand in awe of how wisely and perfectly God made everything. Next, we take time to acknowledge just how deeply offensive our sins are to God. At this point, we must confess that if we want to speak about what is fair, then it would be just and fair if God condemned each and every person in the whole world to suffer eternal punishment (CoD 1.1). If God would elect only one person

unto eternal salvation, that would already be far more than he was ever obliged to do. Yet since the LORD has chosen “many” (Matt 8:11), not just one or two, we have all the more reason to praise God’s overflowing grace and avoid any protest that accuses him of being unfair. Evidently, the order of learning doctrine does make a difference, and it can at least begin to settle a disquieted soul.

Another part of being quick to listen and slow to speak is paying careful attention to the way in which the apostle Paul links predestination and adoption. This is found in Ephesians 1:4–5. Here, once again, are those verses: “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he *predestined* us for *adoption* as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” Often when people think of God’s election, they imagine that in his mind’s eye God foresaw the whole mass of humanity standing before him as an enormous and innocent crowd of people. Then, so they think, the Sovereign One arbitrarily picked a person here and a person there, sending some on the path to heaven while directing others down the road to hell. That is *not* the picture revealed in Ephesians 1. Instead of an innocent crowd, we need to think of orphaned children. Only, these orphans are not nice, sweet, pitiable children. Instead, by nature they are filled with hatred and bitterness; they are bent on living immoral lifestyles (Eph 2:1–3; LD 2, Q&A 5). They are spiritual orphans, not because their parents died, but because they have rebelled and run away from the household of God.

Yet, here is the wonder of God’s electing grace: already in eternity the heavenly Father took a decision to adopt some of these rebels, these run-away sinners, and make them his own children. Please note that election is God’s decision to adopt, not to take some sinners in as foster children. Foster children receive a clean bed, some warm food, and loving care, but adopted children receive all of that and so much more, including an eternal inheritance. Obviously, when God the Father’s election is understood in terms of adoption, it is filled with divine warmth, love, and generosity. This is far different from the other, incorrect picture of a

stern, cold Ruler who callously sends people in one eternal direction or another.

FOCUSING ON SOME DETAILS

Undoubtedly, the doctrine of election is a challenging teaching. However, the first chapter of the Canons of Dort helps us out by providing a summary of the whole doctrine in one sentence. It is a long sentence, but here it is:

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, out of the whole human race, which had fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition, he has, according to the sovereign good pleasure of his will, out of mere grace, chosen in Christ to salvation a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together with them in a common misery (CoD 1.7).

Let us look at this summary detail by detail. First of all, election is *the unchangeable purpose of God*. As mentioned earlier, this has everything to do with God's name and his perfections. The LORD is not a capricious God who acts in a spontaneously haphazard way. On the contrary, he plans carefully and wisely, and then he executes that plan in a sovereign and steady fashion. Psalm 33:11 celebrates that truth in these words: "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."

Second, election occurred *before the foundation of the world*. This fact, revealed both in Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:20, might cause people to wonder why God would choose people who did not even exist yet. We are not able to answer this question fully. After all, the LORD's thoughts are far higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9). However, on the one hand, this truth clearly reveals God's eternity. He created time and is sovereign over it; we dwell in time and are subject to it. Therefore, what is perplexing to us is perfectly sensible to him. On the other hand, this truth also reminds us in an unmistakable way that our salvation is not a cooperative effort between God and us, but only and entirely a work of God's grace. Obviously, we were not there when God elected us before the creation

of the world. Our parents and grandparents were not there either. Even our first parents, Adam and Eve, had not yet been created. So how could we, or any of our ancestors, have made even the slightest contribution toward our salvation? Obviously, those who do not exist cannot assist.

Third, God's election is *out of the whole human race*, but notice especially that the Canons of Dort go on to further describe this human race as having *fallen by its own fault out of its original integrity into sin and perdition*. Here again you see how this confession carefully follows the order in which God reveals things in his Word. Romans 8:28–30 is the classic passage concerning predestination. Yet these verses immediately follow a passage about suffering, groaning, and weakness—all of which are a result of the fall into sin (Rom 8:18–27). Thus, as a summary of what Scripture teaches, the Canons of Dort are justified in describing election as God's choice out of the fallen human race. Even though, chronologically speaking, election happened before the fall, election is, scripturally speaking, revealed after the fall.

Fourth, the Canons specify that God elected *according to the sovereign good pleasure of his will, out of mere grace*. This emphasis is important because the choices that *we* make are often motivated by something in the object that is chosen. Why does someone choose a Honda rather than a Toyota when buying a car? Likely there is something about the features, the styling, or the price of the Honda that catches the eye of the purchaser. However, what is true of human choice is not true of this divine choice. The reason for God's choice lies entirely within himself, not at all in the people chosen. The Canons underline this at the end of the sentence quoted above when they add that the elect are *neither better nor more worthy than others, but involved together in a common misery*. The apostle Paul confirms this in 2 Timothy 1:9 when he says that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”

Fifth, God's decision to save his elect people was made *in Christ*. Thus, the Father's choice was not arbitrarily made but rather centred on Christ.

That makes a big difference. The redemptive work of Christ—his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension—is the axis around which all of world history revolves. Surely, this axis was not set in place by chance, but “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). Just as surely, this axis was not set in place in vain, but rather to save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21). So, since the Son was foreordained to be the Saviour, the Father also foreordained which people were to be saved. After all, what is a Saviour if he has no people to save? Therefore, from eternity, the Father gave the chosen ones to his Son and, in due time, the Son gave eternal life to them (John 17:2, 6–7).

Finally, God has chosen *a definite number of specific persons*. This means that God’s choice was not vague or general. God did not simply decide that he would save *a* people but then fail to specify which particular persons would be included in that people. Such an approach would not fit with God’s perfections. God’s omniscience teaches us that he knows both the big picture and the particular details. If God knew that he wanted to save a people but did not know the particular persons he wanted to save, then he would not know everything. Thankfully, though, our God does know everything (Heb 4:13), including the exact number of people whom he has chosen to be saved.

These further details on election help us to answer some of the questions that arise concerning this doctrine. Since election is God the Father’s gracious decision to save sinners by giving up his own beloved and eternal Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross, how can we still accuse *this* God of being unfair? Added to that, who could ever remain spiritually slothful when so much gratitude is owed to such a gracious God? And, if even our spiritual biography includes a day on which we decided to serve the LORD (Josh 24:15), is it not obvious that God’s eternal choice, made before we even existed, takes precedence? Moreover, the only reason that we want to serve him is that he decided beforehand to work that desire in us (Phil 2:13). Finally, as Ephesians 1:4–5 demonstrates, God’s election does not turn humans into robots; rather, it turns sinful rebels into adopted children. In short, the more fully we understand the doctrine of election, the more noticeably the objections fade away.

BACK TO THE BASIS: WHY DID GOD ELECT?

Important in this connection is Jacob Arminius, a Dutch theologian who lived from 1559 until 1609. Arminius was concerned about some theologians who presented the doctrine of election in such a way that it almost made God sound like a cold and capricious dictator who arbitrarily spared some and callously condemned others. Therefore, although he did not want to reject predestination entirely, he came up with another way to explain it. He taught that before the creation of the world, God looked ahead in time and took note of those people who, once the earth was created and they were alive, would believe in him. Using this foreknowledge, so Arminius argued, God decided, before creation, to save for all eternity those who would believe in him. This teaching is commonly called *election on the basis of foreseen faith* (CoD 1.9).

The main error in this teaching is that ultimately it places the reason for God's choice in human beings rather than in God himself. In Ephesians 1 the apostle Paul emphasizes that God's election and salvation are "according to the purpose of *his* will" (v. 5), "according to the riches of *his* grace" (v. 7), "according to *his* purpose" (v. 9), and "according to the purpose of *him* who works according to the counsel of *his* will" (v. 11). The point is obvious: the basis of God's election is found in him, not in us. In addition to contradicting Scripture, the Arminian view of election also undermines our assurance of salvation (CoD 1.12–13). Indisputably, all of us are more fickle than we care to admit. Spiritually we have high peaks and low valleys. We change our minds and lose our direction. Therefore, if our election depended, even a little, on ourselves, then we could never be certain of our salvation. Thankfully, our election is based entirely on God's good pleasure and grace. So, looking in faith to him alone, we can be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see (Heb 11:1).

REPROBATION

Reprobation is the other side of God's eternal decree. The Bible, as the book of good news, says far more about election than reprobation. However, the Lord does tell us that he not only chose to show compassion to

some; he also decided to harden others. As the apostle Paul writes, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Rom 9:18). It is noteworthy that the apostle puts forward Pharaoh as an example of how God hardens someone (Rom 9:17). Several times in the book of Exodus we hear that Pharaoh and his officials hardened themselves (Exod 8:15, 32; 9:34). Yet we also learn that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Exod 7:3; 9:12; 10:20; 14:8). Here we stand before a mystery that we cannot fully fathom, and we must be careful not to curiously inquire beyond what our mental capacities allow (BC 13).

Nevertheless, two things need to be mentioned. In the first place, Pharaoh, and anyone else who hardens his heart against God, is accountable for that sin. They cannot blame God for their own rebellion (Jas 1:13–15). Beyond this, we should remember that fallen human beings are inclined by nature to hate God and their neighbours (LD 2). They are neither innocent nor neutral. If God chooses to leave them in their rebellion, then he has done nothing wrong. If he decides to turn them away from the path of destruction on which they have set themselves and grant them eternal life instead, then he has done something very gracious.

Second, God sometimes chooses to harden people in their sins in order to display the brightness of his compassion against the dark background of their stubbornness. As the apostle Paul explains:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom 9:22–24)

In other words, we, who are nothing but clay, should not presume to criticize the divine Potter concerning the manner in which he shapes the various clay jars on the spinning wheel of his sovereignty. “Will what is moulded say to its moulder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for dishonourable use?” (Rom 9:20–21)

The answer to this question is most certainly yes; the Potter has the right to shape his clay according to his plan and desire.

Before leaving this topic of reprobation, we should still say a word about God's children who sometimes fear that they have been left out of God's electing grace. In short, they are afraid that they might be reprobate. In the first place, if you have had such fears, or if you know someone who worries about this, be assured that you are not alone. The Canons of Dort even dedicate a whole article to this topic: Chapter 1, Article 16. Obviously, the authors of this confession knew how often such anxieties can arise. The response of the confession is tenderly pastoral. Sometimes there are those who believe in the Lord but whose faith is so weak that they worry if they are perhaps reprobate. Then, there are also those Christians who fall into serious sins or who just cannot seem to resist temptation as consistently and effectively as they would like. They, too, may doubt their election and fear reprobation.

It is true that God is a holy God. People who completely give themselves over to an immoral and ungodly life should rightly fear God's wrath. However, there are also those who are saddened by their sins and who are frustrated that their faith and their ability to resist temptation are still so feeble. When God's children go through such struggles, they need not be afraid that they are reprobate. "God has promised not to quench the smoking flax nor to break the bruised reed" (CoD 1.16; see also Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20). All of God's promises, including this one, are "Yes" and "Amen" in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20), to praise of his glory and to the comfort of his people.

COVENANT AND ELECTION

There is one last question concerning election that we touched on earlier but needs extra attention. It revolves around this question: how is God's covenant related to God's election? Are they the same thing? Are they different? If so, how are they different? These questions become practical and personal as well. Should we think of every person who has been baptized, and who so has received the sign of God's covenant, as being one of God's elect?

To begin with, there are lines of similarity between covenant and election. Here are three that can be mentioned briefly:

- The God who initiated the covenant (Gen 17:7) is the same God who made the eternal decree to adopt some sinners as his own children (Eph 1:4).
- God demonstrates his unmerited mercy in the covenant (Deut 7:7–9) just as surely as he shows it in election (Rom 9:15).
- Christ is the mediator of the covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Tim 2:5), and the decree of election was made in Christ (Eph 1:4–5).

At the same time, election and covenant cannot be equated with each other. There are at least three key differences:

- Election refers to God’s plan, or decree, regarding his salvation of sinners (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:5), while the covenant refers to God’s relationship with sinners (Lev 26:12).
- God’s election occurred before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4), while the covenant was made in time and history with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17).
- God’s decree of election cannot be changed (Ps 33:11), but the covenant can be broken, although it should not be, by sinful human beings (Deut 31:16).

So, how do these two doctrines fit together? Perhaps the most straightforward way is to say that God’s covenant of grace is a special instrument that God uses in time and history in order to bring his plan, made before the creation of the world, to completion on the final day. All those whom God chose in eternity will certainly be there, in glory, on the new heaven and earth. Working towards that final goal, God uses the covenant relationship. Not everyone in the covenant of grace is elect, just as “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,” as the apostle Paul says in Romans 9:6. Moreover, even though both Jacob and Esau belonged to God’s covenant people, and both were circumcised, yet the LORD says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom 9:13).

At the same time, even though we know from Scripture that some members of the covenant are not among the elect, this should not send us down into a spiral of spiritual doubt. Instead, let us cling to God's sure promises in faith, repent and flee from all sin, and find our eternal hope in the all-sufficient cross of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who comforts the troubled soul and does not break the bruised reed (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20; CoD 1.16).

Suggested Readings: Deuteronomy 7:6–11; Ephesians 1:1–14

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. You may encounter Christians who speak a lot about choosing for Christ but who know very little about God's electing choice. Briefly but thoroughly, describe how you would introduce this doctrine to them. List at least three essential aspects of this doctrine, and support each aspect with a text from Scripture.
2. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone "rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious" (1 Pet 2:4, 6). Why is it significant that Christ's being chosen was also part of the eternal decree? Also read the Canons of Dort 1.7 and explain what it means that Christ was appointed to be "the Mediator and Head of all the elect"? What is the difference between his role as Mediator and his function as Head? How does each one benefit us?
3. The title of this chapter is "Election: God's Decision to Adopt." Explain what this means. Explore how it helps us understand the doctrine of election more deeply as well as answer some objections that are raised against this doctrine. In addition to Ephesians 1:4–5, the following will be helpful: Romans 8:12–17 (about adoption) and Romans 8:28–39 (about election). Notice especially Romans 8:29, where we read that God's chosen ones are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."
4. What exactly is election on the basis of foreseen faith? Is it just a slightly different opinion about election, or is it a serious error?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. The introduction to this chapter outlines some of the common questions and objections that people have concerning election. Have you heard other questions or objections? If so, what are they, and how would you answer them?
2. Imagine that a fellow member of the church comes to you for advice. She is very worried. Even though she desires with all her heart to be saved, she is afraid that she might be condemned along with the reprobates. How would you guide and comfort her?
3. In the Canons of Dort parents receive the assurance that they ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their covenant children “whom God calls out of this life in their infancy” (CoD 1.17). For how long, or until what age, does this assurance apply? Does this truth also extend to young children? To teenagers? To make this practical, consider the following situation. The sixteen-year-old son of believing parents has died in a car crash. During the last two years he questioned many things about God and faith. He still attended church, but privately his parents used to wonder whether he would continue to worship the Lord if they gave him the option of doing whatever he wanted to on the Lord’s Day. What should we say to these parents? Can we say that they, too, ought not to doubt the salvation and election of their child?

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