

Doctrines of Grace

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This study is set in the form of Q&A, after the manner of the old catechisms. We do not set out to prove a system of man, but rather to set forth a systematic theology on the doctrines of election and free will, with attention to their implications for individual salvation. We will also address related doctrines, particularly those which are associated with what is commonly called “Calvinism” and “Arminianism.” I am little concerned with what men say, either in their individual treatises, or in the Baptist Confession of 1644 (for example), and greatly concerned with what God says in His Word. It is better to go straight to the source and consult the Scriptures. For in the pages of Scripture, we meet our loving Creator, and enjoy the blessing and truth of His revelation.

1. What is election, and where do we find it in the Bible? Election is God’s sovereign choice of individual(s) for a particular purpose. For the purpose of this study, individual election is made unto salvation on the basis and merits of Christ’s work. Ephesians 1:4, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, John 15:16, Romans 8:28-33, Matthew 11:27, Mark 13:20, Acts 13:48, Romans 9:11-13, Revelation 13:8.
2. Is it possible that election is a misleading or incorrect term due to translation errors from the Greek text of the New Testament? No. The Greek word translated “elect” is “eklektos”, meaning “picked out, chosen.” The Greek word translated “chosen” is “eklego”, meaning “picked out, selected.” Both words come from the Greek word “lego.”
3. What is free will, and where do we find it in the Bible? Free will is man’s ability to choose his own destiny. Joshua 24:15, Mark 1:15, 1 Timothy 2:4, Acts 17:30.
4. Which is the determining factor in individual salvation, divine choice or human choice? Divine choice is the determining factor, since no man would ever come to God for salvation in and of himself. Romans 3:11, John 3:27, Ephesians 2:1. Man’s actions, however, cannot negate the sovereign decree of divine election. Both election and free will are Bible doctrines. We will not understand how they work together this side of heaven. Isaiah 55:8-9.
5. Does God predestine, or elect, people to be eternally lost? No. God leaves the reprobate to their own natural sinful proclivities. Romans 1:18-32.
6. Is God’s choice based upon foreseen faith of the individual? No. Faith is the gift of God, and no one can have faith apart from God. Ephesians 2:8.
7. What is “Calvinism”, and what is the acronym “TULIP?” Calvinism is the theological system that reflects the teachings of John Calvin. TULIP=Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints. (Unconditional Election has been covered in sections 1-6. The others will be covered shortly.)

8. What is “Arminianism?” Arminianism is the theological system that reflects the teachings of James Arminius. His teachings were essentially a rejection of those of Calvin.
9. What is the doctrine of total depravity, and where do we find it in the Bible? Total Depravity teaches that man is both unable and unwilling to choose God if left to his own devices. Genesis 2:16-17, Romans 5:12-14 (original sin), Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 3:23, 8:7-8.
10. Is the atonement of Christ limited or unlimited? Unlimited, and this point of Calvinistic theology we reject. John 3:16, Hebrews 7:27, 1 John 2:2. Some verses, such as Matthew 20:28, stress the effect of the atonement with regard to believers only, but do not exclude the clear fact that Christ died for all. His blood was sufficient payment for all sins of all people, but it is only efficient in the case of the elect.
11. What is the doctrine of irresistible grace, and where do we find it in the Bible? Salvation is the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, and it cannot be defeated once purposed. John 17:2, Romans 8:14, 1 Peter 1:1-2, John 3:3-8, John 6:37,44-45, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Isaiah 55:11.
12. What is the doctrine of perseverance of the saints (aka, eternal security), and where do we find it in the Bible? Once someone makes a true profession of Christian faith, he cannot lose his heavenly inheritance. John 5:24, 10:27-30, Romans 8:35-39, Ephesians 1:13-14, Hebrews 7:25, 1 Peter 1:3-5. What about people who fall away from the faith? Either they were never truly saved (God knows) or they are saved but will lose rewards (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).
13. Is it essential to believe any of these doctrines of grace in order to be saved? No. One can be saved despite having an incomplete theological understanding, simply based on belief through faith. Acts 16:31, 8:29-38 are examples of this.
14. If there are differences of opinions on these doctrines, should Christian fellowship be broken? With regard to the doctrine of eternal security, we should hold the line regarding church to church fellowship. A denial of this doctrine is a denial of the truth of all of John 3:16.
15. Should we avoid preaching and teaching these doctrines because of their controversial nature? No. We are to preach and teach all the Scripture. God inspired its very words for a reason. If there are elect people, then the doctrine of election surely exists. Acts 20:27, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.
16. If God already knows the end from the beginning (if election is a truly biblical doctrine), why should we pray or evangelize? We do these things out of obedience, fellowship with God, and a desire to be used of God to further His plans and purposes. 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18, Matthew 6:10, 28:18-20; Romans 10:13-17.

Further Reading: “The Five Points of Calvinism”, Steele, Thomas, and Quinn, “Handbook of Basic Bible Texts”, John Jefferson Davis, “Unconditional Election: Sermon No. 41-42”, Charles Spurgeon