



An Overview and Dialogue on  
Conditional and Unconditional

# ELECTION

Dr. David Crowe

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# **ELECTION**

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*Dedicated to all of the people who have asked about election throughout my ministry and to the wonderful people of South Orlando Baptist Church who patiently endure my exercise of the spiritual gift of preaching and teaching.*



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# PROLOGUE

Greetings, brothers and sisters in Christ! If you are reading this, it is because you want to understand God's Word better, and that is the best reason to read anything. In our church family, we cherish digging into the Bible together, even when it becomes challenging.

In this short book, we are exploring the two main views of the challenging and mysterious doctrine of election.

One view is **Conditional Election**. This teaches that God chooses people for salvation because He sees ahead of time that they will put their faith in Jesus. It is like God knowing your heart will say yes to Him, so He welcomes you into His family.

The other is **Unconditional Election**. This says God chooses people simply out of His great love and kindness, without any conditions from us. It is not based on what we do or will do, it is God's free and sovereign gift.

Both views are an attempt to deal with two truth that are found in scripture that seem to contradict: 1. The Sovereignty of God, and 2. The personal responsibility of man. Conditional Election sides more with the personal responsibility of man - placing a heavy emphasis on free will and grace enabling man to decide. Unconditional Election sides more with the Sovereignty of God, placing a heavy emphasis on God's pure grace as the author and finisher of our faith. Which side is correct?

Both views come from people who deeply love Jesus and trust the Bible fully. Both can be found among Baptist and



evangelical Christian leaders in our nation. As an example, two of the most influential figures in Baptist and broader Christian evangelism over the last seventy years were Billy Graham and D. James Kennedy. Billy Graham, America's beloved preacher and crusade evangelist, held firmly to the view of Conditional Election. D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and author of *Evangelism Explosion*, the premier evangelism training course used widely in Southern Baptist churches during the 1970s–90s, adhered steadfastly to Unconditional Election. Despite their differing theological positions, they each shared a profound love for the church, for the lost, and for one another.

In our own church family, many lean toward Conditional Election and may not have encountered much about the Unconditional view. We also have members who lean toward Unconditional Election. My hope is not to convert anyone to a different perspective but to equip the church for loving dialogue and even deeper unity amid these diverse theological challenges. I pray this book serves as a gentle bridge, helping us better understand and appreciate one another's viewpoints.

May God bless our shared love for Him, for the lost, and for each other as fellow believers.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Crowe

# CHAPTER 1

## DEFINITION OF TERMS



*“Virtually all churches have some doctrine of predestination. Most churches agree that God’s decision is made before we are born. The issue then rests upon the question, “On what basis does God make that decision?”*

*R.C. Sproul, Chosen by God, Tyndale House Publishers, 1986, page 23.*



Before we get into the fun stuff, let's make sure we're all on the same page with some simple definitions.

**Election:** This is God's amazing choice of certain people to be saved and spend forever with Him in heaven.

**Conditional Election:** God elects, or chooses, people based on His foreknowledge of their faith in Jesus. In other words, He looks ahead and sees who will trust Christ, and then He seals that choice. Faith is the "condition" that makes it

personal. This view highlights that God is loving and fair, giving every person the real chance to say yes to Jesus through the Holy Spirit's help. No one is forced, but everyone is invited.

**Unconditional Election:** God elects people purely because of His own good pleasure and love, there is nothing we bring to the table. It's not based on our actions, merits, or even foreseen faith. From before the world began, God picked some to show His grace in a big way. This view stresses God's total control and how He rescues us when we couldn't rescue ourselves.

**Conditionalists:** Folks who believe in Conditional Election. They often emphasize human responsibility, God's universal love, and the wide-open call of the gospel to all people. In Baptist life, they have also been referred to as “traditionalists” and “non-Calvinists.”

**Unconditionalists:** Those who hold to Unconditional Election. They focus on God's sovereignty, the security of salvation, and how everything points back to His glory. In Baptist life, they have been referred to as “Reformed Baptists” or the more controversial term “Calvinists.” (Many Unconditional Baptists do not like or accept the title of “Calvinist” due to other doctrines that John Calvin taught or believed or for common misconceptions associated with the term. You will learn more about John Calvin in chapter 8.)

**Predestination:** God's sovereign decision, made before time, to choose individuals for salvation and to conform them to

the image of Christ, according to His will and purpose. (The debate comes from how you define election and how God makes His choice.)

**Prevenient Grace:** Held by conditionalists, prevenient grace is the universal, initiating work of God's grace that precedes and enables human faith and repentance. It is the Holy Spirit's preparatory influence on all people, countering the effects of total depravity (humanity's inherent sinfulness) by restoring the ability to freely respond to the gospel without coercion. This grace "goes before" salvation, awakening the conscience, drawing individuals toward God, and making the choice to believe in Christ possible for everyone, regardless of their fallen state.

**Sovereign Grace:** Held by Unconditionalists, sovereign grace refers to the initiating, sustaining, and completing work of God's grace in salvation, exercised entirely according to His supreme authority and eternal purpose, without dependence on human merit, foreseen faith, or cooperation. It underscores that salvation is a free gift from God's unchanging will, irresistibly drawing the elect to Himself while glorifying His holiness and mercy.

# CHAPTER 2

## KEY PASSAGES FOR CONDITIONAL ELECTION WITH RESPONSES FROM UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION



*"One country theologian said, "This is the way election works: God votes for you, and the devil votes against you; and you cast the deciding vote." Well, I don't know if that's exactly the way it is or not, but I want to tell you this much, that whosoever will, whosoever will, may come to the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 22:17)."*

*Adrian Rogers, from the Sermon "Faith to Face the Future," in Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Heb 11:20.*



When I get into any discussion on Election, I like to go straight to the Bible and deal with the passages that address this doctrine. In this chapter, we'll look closely at eight important Bible passages that Conditionalists often use. Each

one is quoted from the ESV Bible. After each passage, I will give a Conditionalist commentary, then, an Unconditionalist will respond thoughtfully. Finally, the Conditionalist will wrap up with a quick reply. In the next chapter, I will attempt the same approach from eight Unconditional Election passages.

### **Passage 1: John 3:16 (ESV)**

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** This is the heart of the gospel. God loves the whole world, everyone, and offers Jesus to all. "Whoever believes" shows salvation is open to anyone who chooses faith. Election here means God chooses those who believe, making it conditional on that trust. It paints God as a loving Father inviting everyone to salvation.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Unconditionalists agree that John 3:16 is gold, yes God's love is huge! But "world" doesn't mean every single person gets saved automatically; it means people from every nation, not just Jews. The "whoever believes" part? God makes that belief happen for His chosen ones through His Spirit. It's still all grace, not human effort.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Conditionalists agree "world" includes all kinds of people, yes! But the verse ties salvation straight to believing, which anyone can do with God's help.

## Passage 2: 1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV)

*“who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** Paul is clear: God desires every person to be saved. Election must fit this, He chooses based on who responds in faith, so no one is left out unwillingly. It's conditional to keep God's will fair and loving for all.

**Unconditionalist Response:** God can desire both a universal salvation of all people and a particular salvation of the elect (See Ezek. 33:11 vs. Ezek. 21:3–5). There are many other passages that stress God's sovereign desire for the elect ones he has chosen. (Eph. 1:3-6, 11; Rom. 9:10-24). If the text taught universal Conditional Election, it would contradict explicit statements that God sovereignly hardens some (e.g., Rom. 9) and that God's mercy is exercised according to his purpose.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Conditionalists agree on God's universal desire, but stress that this verse shows His heart for all to know truth. Conditional Election honors that desire by letting faith be the door everyone can knock on so that God's will and our response work together beautifully.

## Passage 3: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

*“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** Peter says God doesn't want anyone to die without Him, He waits for everyone to repent. Election is conditional on that repentance through faith, showing God's patience gives real space for choice.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Unconditionalists are quick to point out that the context that explains that the "You" here is believers, so God ensures His elect repent. He doesn't want the chosen to perish, and His delay shows mercy. Unconditional Election therefore fits with this passage.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Conditionalists agree on "you" as referring to believers, but the "any" and "all" point to a broader hope. The Conditional view lets God's patience shine by truly offering repentance to all.

#### **Passage 4: Romans 8:29-30 (ESV)**

*“For those whom he 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.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** This golden chain starts with "foreknew", God knowing ahead who will believe. He predestines those folks to become like Jesus. It's conditional on foreseen faith, securing the whole journey for believers.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Unconditionalists define "foreknew" to mean God's intimate, choosing love. Since the



word “know” in the Bible is often translated to mean “love,” they would define “Foreknowledge” as “Fore-loved.”

**Conditionalist Final Response:** "Foreknew" as love is sweet, but the Bible uses it for advance knowledge too. Conditional Election keeps the chain tied to faith, which God woos us toward.

### **Passage 5: 1 Peter 1:1-2 (ESV)**

*“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, 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: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** Peter greets believers as elect through God's foreknowledge, meaning their foreseen faith. The Spirit helps obedience, but it's conditional on choosing Christ. This makes election a team effort: God's call and our yes.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Foreknowledge is God's sovereign election and love of us before the foundation of the world, leading to the Spirit's work. Obedience flows from God's choice, not ours first. It humbles us to see salvation as completely His doing.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Eternal love, yes! But foreknowledge includes seeing our obedient faith. The

Conditional view boosts our role in responding, keeping us eager to obey.

### **Passage 6: Acts 17:30 (ESV)**

*“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** God calls all people everywhere to repent, no favorites. Election is conditional on responding to this command, showing salvation's door is open to whoever turns to Him.

**Unconditionalist Response:** The command goes out to all, but God grants repentance to His elect ones (see 2 Tim 2:25). None can even come to the Father and repent unless the Father draws them (John 6:44). Unconditional Election ensures some actually do it by His power.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Commands to all mean real opportunity for all. Conditional Election says yes, God empowers the response without forcing it.

### **Passage 7: John 1:12 (ESV)**

*“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** Receiving and believing in Jesus makes us God's kids, simple! Election is for those who do this, conditional on faith. It's God's gift, but we unwrap it by trusting.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Spot on, faith receives Christ! But the next verse tells us that all Christians become saved not by “the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” God gives that faith to the elect as a gift (Eph 2:8). Becoming children is His initiative, securing our family spot.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Faith as gift? Agreed, but it's ours to exercise. Conditional view celebrates the "all who" invite, making adoption feel personal and free.

### **Passage 8: Romans 10:13 (ESV)**

*“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”*

**Conditionalist Commentary:** Paul quotes Joel: Call on Jesus, and you're saved, everyone! Election honors this promise, conditional on calling in faith. It's God's yes to our cry.

**Unconditionalist Response:** Powerful promise! God draws the elect to call (John 6:44). The "everyone" is those He enables, turning cries into salvation.

**Conditionalist Final Response:** Drawing us to call, yes! But the verse's wide "everyone" fits Conditional Election perfectly, urging us to invite all to call.

# CHAPTER 3

## KEY PASSAGES FOR UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION WITH RESPONSES FROM CONDITIONAL ELECTION



*"John Newton used to tell a whimsical story, and laugh at it, too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, "Ah! sir, the Lord must have loved me before I was born, or else He would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards." I am sure it is true in my case; I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards..."*

*Charles H. Spurgeon, from his essay "A Defence of Calvinism," originally published in the April 1856 issue of The Sword and the Trowel.*



Now, flipping the dialogue, here are eight top passages that Unconditionalists treasure. Again with the Bible verse, the commentary, a response, and a final response.

### **Passage 1: Ephesians 1:4-5 (ESV)**

*“even as 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 to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** This passage highlights God's timeless, sovereign selection of specific individuals for salvation, grounded entirely in His compassionate will and intentions, without regard to any anticipated virtue or decision on their part. The pre-creation choice, centered in Christ, aims to shape the elect into lives of purity, prioritizing divine agency over personal effort.

**Conditionalist Response:** Although this verse celebrates God's affectionate initiative, the selection "in him" suggests incorporation through faith, where divine foresight includes anticipated trust that harmonizes with His intentions. This relational predestination extends an open call to all, upholding God's equity by offering election through prevenient grace to everyone, free from capricious exclusion.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** In this context, foreknowledge signifies God's intimate, determining affection that establishes the elect, rather than mere observation of autonomous faith; the focus on "his will" rules out preconditions, anchoring salvation wholly in God's decree to

eliminate self-congratulation and celebrate unearned compassion.

## **Passage 2: Romans 9:11-16 (ESV)**

*“Yet, before the children had been born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose in election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls, she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** This is one of the strongest passages in all of the Bible for Unconditional Election. God chose Jacob over Esau before they “had done anything good or bad.” This rules out a conditional salvation according to foreseen faith. Also, the question Paul raises here (“Is there any injustice on God’s part”) can only make sense if he is defending an Unconditional perspective, for no one would ever say that God was unjust if he allowed Jacob or Esau to choose. If God is the one that chooses, then the question Paul raises of God’s injustice can be expected.

**Conditionalist Response:** The mention of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) is referring to nations, not souls. God's mercy is for all who seek. "Not by works" just tells us that faith is a non-work response. Before they had done “good or bad” is just another way of saying “foreknowledge.”

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** Unconditionalists agree that both the nations are in view in this passage but also the individuals. The argument that this passage is only referring to nations only, if true, would not subtract at all from the sovereign choice of God but would only magnify it.

### **Passage 3: Romans 8:29-30 (ESV)**

*“For those whom he 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.”*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** This passage presents the Golden chain of redemption. All of the people God foreknows (loves beforehand) he predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies. The key to interpretation is the word “foreknows” which is translated as “fore loved.”

**Conditionalist Response:** Conditionalists say that the chain starts with foreknown faith whereby God elects believers.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** Like Jacob, foreknowledge is a chosen love, not based on any foreseen acts from us. God gets all of the glory for salvation.

### **Passage 4: John 6:37, 44 (ESV)**

*“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... No one can come to me*

*unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.”*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** The Father gives specific people to Jesus and they come. His drawing ensures it. It is God's pull that draws people to Jesus, not our push.

**Conditionalist Response:** Drawing invites all (John 12:32); we respond freely. "Gives" are believers who come by choice.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** The invitation is wide but only effective for the elect. Unconditionalists highlight God's irresistible grace in the pull.

### **Passage 5: Acts 13:48 (ESV)**

*“And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** The wording “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” links belief to a prior appointment/appointment to life. Unconditional interpreters see this as evidence that those who believed were those God had previously appointed to life, that belief was the result, not the cause, of the appointment.

**Conditionalist Response:** Appointed by their glad response, our foreseen faith appoints us. Our foreseen belief comes first in the process of a divine appointment.



**Unconditionalist Final Response:** "Appointed" (like "ordained") points to God's choice before, not just seeing ahead, faith follows the setting, as the words put belief second to God's aim.

### **Passage 6: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

*"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** The whole saving, grace through faith, is God's free gift, not something we make happen. It stops bragging by saying even faith comes from His kindness, not us starting it. Election gives the faith that takes hold of grace, with no room for earning.

**Conditionalist Response:** Grace gives power for faith, a gift that's not bragging-worthy and open to all to fight works-salvation. "This" covers it all (grace-plus-faith), keeping the need to receive it real, as faith simply says yes to God's help first.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** "This" includes faith as the gift, from electing kindness (v. 10's good works come after choice).

### **Passage 7: 2 Timothy 1:9 (ESV)**

*"who 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,"*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** Rescue and call to holy living come from God's plan and kindness before time, in Christ, not from what we do. This puts election first in kindness, sure to make holy lives, with no foreseen faith as the reason.

**Conditionalist Response:** Kindness from before time plans to save through faith God sees in Christ, with the call asking a reply to this open kindness. "Not because of works" hits rule-keeping, not faith, letting grace-boosted trust fill God's plan.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** The phrase "before the ages began" places God's gift of grace before any human action takes place. This makes His purpose the only reason for election, faith comes as a later result, so it can't set the condition for something that happened before time even started. This no-strings-attached kindness crushes any sense of self-reliance, putting all the glory on Christ.

### **Passage 8: Romans 9:22-23 (ESV)**

*"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, "*

**Unconditionalist Commentary:** God shapes some for kindness (elect) and puts up with those for wrath to show His anger, power, and glory in both fair and kind ways. Election's shaping is from His choice, not foreseen faith. This sovereign

“potter-power” shows God's full character which is above reproach.

**Conditionalist Response:** God shows his kindness only after seeing us say “yes” to patient grace, while he reserves his wrath for those who say no; God's patience shows His want for all to turn back (2 Pet. 3:9), revealing His glory through open kindness for everyone.

**Unconditionalist Final Response:** "Prepared beforehand" for both means God's predestined plan involves his salvation of individuals before He created them.



# CHAPTER 4

## CLAIMED BENEFITS IN LIFE AND PRACTICE FOR CONDITIONAL ELECTION WITH DIALOGUE FROM UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION



*“Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.”*

*Paragraph 1 of Section V of “The Baptist Faith and Message 2000,” the confessional statement of the Southern Baptist Convention.*



As we have been studying, Conditional Election refers to the belief that God elects individuals for salvation based on His foreknowledge of their free response of faith in Christ. Conditionalists teach that believing in Conditional Election offers several theological and practical benefits for Christians, as it harmonizes divine sovereignty with human responsibility, emphasizes God's justice and love, and aligns with key biblical patterns. Below, I'll outline the key benefits emphasized by Conditionalists, drawing from scriptural reasoning and doctrinal insights.

## **1. Conditional Election Emphasizes Human Responsibility and Free Will in Salvation**

This view portrays salvation as a cooperative process where God's grace enables but does not coerce human choice, making faith a genuine, voluntary response. It resolves tensions between God's sovereignty and human agency by showing that divine "drawing" (John 6:44) responds to a prior heart disposition, such as fearing God or attentively hearing the Word. This encourages believers to actively pursue God, knowing their decisions matter, and fosters a sense of personal accountability in spiritual growth.

**Unconditional Election Response:** Scripture's calls to repent and believe (Acts 17:30) are urgent and real. Unconditional Election harmonizes responsibility with grace by affirming that while humans are accountable for unbelief (John 3:18-19), our 'free will' is liberated only by God's prior regenerating work, turning slaves to sin into willing servants of righteousness (Romans 6:17-18). Faith isn't a meritorious

work we muster but the Spirit-wrought response to irresistible grace (John 6:37, 44), preserving Ephesians 2:8-9's truth that salvation is God's gift from start to finish. This doesn't diminish responsibility, it heightens it, as we respond in gratitude to the One who first loved us (1 John 4:19).

## **2. Conditional Election Upholds God's Impartiality and Justice**

By conditioning election on foreseen faith rather than arbitrary selection, God treats all people equally, offering salvation to everyone without favoritism (Acts 10:34-35). Critics of Unconditional Election argue it implies God predestines some to damnation, raising questions about divine fairness; Conditional Election avoids this by making salvation available to all who believe, aligning with verses like Romans 2:11 ("God shows no partiality"). This presents God as a just judge who rewards faith universally, enhancing trust in His character.

**Unconditional Election Response:** Unconditionalists also deeply value an emphasis on God's impartiality (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11), it's a clarion call to proclaim the gospel without partiality, as the early church did among Jews and Gentiles alike. From the Unconditional view, election magnifies this justice even more profoundly: God's choice isn't arbitrary but flows from His perfect wisdom and holiness, electing some to mercy while justly passing over others in sin (Romans 9:22-23), all to display His multifaceted glory. Far from predestining to damnation, it

underscores that no one deserves salvation; all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and election is pure grace, not favoritism based on ethnicity, works, or foreseen faith, which could subtly introduce human merit or bragging. This portrays God as the supremely just Judge who sovereignly extends mercy where He wills (Romans 9:15), evoking profound trust: If salvation is His free gift, not earned by response, we rest in His unchanging fairness. Unconditionalists marvel at this justice, sharing the good news that "whosoever will" may come, knowing the Spirit draws whom the Father has given (John 6:37).

### **3. Conditional Election Aligns Closely with Biblical Narratives of Responsive Grace**

Scripture often depicts God's sovereign interventions (e.g., opening hearts or appointing to eternal life) as rewards for prior human commitment, such as in the stories of Lydia (Acts 16:14) and Cornelius (Acts 10), who were already God-fearers before receiving deeper revelation. This pattern, commitment precedes grace, supports Conditional Election as more scripturally consistent, avoiding forced interpretations of passages like Romans 9 (which focuses on corporate election of Israel vs. Gentiles) and promoting a holistic reading of the Bible.

**Unconditional Election Response:** Unconditionalists see a gift to linger in these rich narratives, like Lydia's heart opened by the Lord (Acts 16:14) and Cornelius's devout seeking rewarded with revelation (Acts 10:1-4), as they pulse with God's pursuing grace. Unconditionalists cherish



them as illustrations of how the sovereign God works through human responsiveness, not despite it. In Unconditional Election, these stories fit seamlessly as outworkings of His eternal decree: The "prior commitment" Conditionalists note is itself the fruit of His electing grace, regenerating hearts to seek Him first (Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 6:44). Romans 9, far from being "corporate only," it speaks to God's sovereign choice of individuals within nations (vv. 6-13, Jacob over Esau), but even there, it's corporate election that serves the individual salvation of the remnant (Romans 11:5-7). This doesn't force interpretations but reveals a God who ordains both the ends (faith) and the means (responsive narratives), weaving a tapestry of grace-initiated response. As we read Scripture holistically, these stories stir us to pray for hearts like Lydia's, trusting the God who opens them for His glory.

#### **4. Conditional Election Encourages Evangelism and Universal Hope**

If election depends on faith, every person has the potential for salvation through responding to the gospel, motivating Christians to share the message widely (as in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19-20). This counters potential discouragement in Unconditional views, where some might feel evangelism is futile for the non-elect. It also instills hope: assurance of salvation comes from one's faith, not inscrutable divine decree, making eternal security feel accessible and relational.

**Unconditional Election Response:** Your passion for the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the hope it

ignites in every soul is infectious, evangelism is our joyful duty, and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder in that call! Unconditional Election fuels this fire even more: Knowing God has ordained the gospel as the means to call His elect (2 Timothy 2:10; James 5:20), we proclaim it boldly to all, with zero futility, because the Spirit effectually applies it to those the Father draws (Acts 13:48). Far from discouragement, it brings unshakable hope: Assurance isn't rooted in our fluctuating faith but in God's irrevocable election and Christ's unbreakable intercession (Romans 8:33-39; John 10:28-29), making security profoundly relational, resting on the One who chose us eternally. This relational depth motivates us: If God so loved His elect that He sent His Son (John 3:16, applied particularly), how can we not plead with the world to be reconciled (2 Corinthians 5:20)? Let's evangelize with renewed vigor, offering the universal call while trusting His particular grace.

## **5. Conditional Election Highlights God's Universal Love and Desire for All to Be Saved**

Conditional Election underscores passages like 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, where God "desires all people to be saved" and is "not willing that any should perish." It portrays a relational God who woos humanity through prevenient grace (enabling free choice) without overriding will, fostering a deeper appreciation for divine love as invitational rather than selective. This can strengthen worship and evangelism by emphasizing God's goodness toward all creation.

**Unconditional Election Response:** These verses, 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, are treasures. In Unconditional Election, this universal love shines without contradiction: God's "desire" for all to be saved is His revealed will, commanding repentance for every creature (Mark 16:15), while His secret will sovereignly accomplishes salvation for the elect (Ephesians 1:11), harmonizing His goodness with His power. Unconditional Election upholds the general call of the gospel extended to all, but only God's effectual grace irresistibly draws the elect, portraying a God whose love is both invitational (to all) and particular (for His chosen, John 17:9; Ephesians 5:25). This invitational depth, rooted in election, fosters worship: Unconditionalists adore a God whose selective mercy doesn't diminish His universal benevolence but magnifies it, as He redeems a people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). In this, evangelism becomes an act of love, echoing His heart for creation.

In summary, Conditional Election benefits Christians by promoting a balanced theology that integrates grace, responsibility, and love, leading to greater motivation in faith, evangelism, and trust in God's fairness. While debates with Unconditional Election persist, this view resonates with many as a faithful expression of Scripture's emphasis on "whosoever believes" (John 3:16).



# CHAPTER 5

## CLAIMED BENEFITS IN LIFE AND PRACTICE FOR UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION WITH DIALOGUE FROM CONDITIONAL ELECTION



*"Election refers to God's choosing whom to save. It is Unconditional in that there is no condition man must meet before God chooses to save him. Man is dead in trespasses and sins. So there is no condition he can meet before God chooses to save him from his deadness."*

*John Piper, Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace (Broadman & Holman, 2010), p. 53.*



We now turn to the claimed benefits of the Unconditional Election view. Each benefit will include a response from the Conditional Election view.

## 1. Unshakable Assurance of Salvation

Unconditional Election provides rock-solid confidence that salvation rests entirely on God's eternal, unchanging decree, not on personal performance or wavering faith (Romans 8:29-30; John 10:28-29). This frees believers from anxiety over "falling away," allowing joyful focus on intimacy with Christ amid doubts or failures, fostering peace that guards hearts (Philippians 4:7).

**Conditional Election Response:** Conditionalists also celebrate this deep assurance as a gift from a faithful God, it's the same peace they find in clinging to Christ's promises (John 3:16)! In Conditional Election, assurance is equally unshakable, rooted in the evidence of genuine faith as a fruit of God's enabling grace (2 Peter 1:10; Hebrews 3:14), which He sustains through our union with Him. Far from anxiety, it motivates us to 'examine ourselves' not in fear but in loving response, growing in the relational security of a God who woos us to persevere. Together, let's rest in the Savior who holds us fast, whether by decree or by faithful embrace.

## 2. Profound Humility and Gratitude

By attributing salvation wholly to God's free choice, unrelated to any foreseen merit, it crushes human boasting (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 1:31), cultivating a posture of utter dependence and humility. This leads to overflowing gratitude in daily life, transforming mundane moments into altars of praise for unearned mercy, and relationships into platforms for extending grace to others.

**Conditional Election Response:** What a beautiful fruit, humility that echoes the tax collector's prayer (Luke 18:13)! Conditional Election echoes this by viewing faith not as a boastful work but as the humble, Spirit-enabled response to grace (Ephesians 2:8), preventing any self-congratulation while highlighting God's initiative in drawing us first (John 6:44). Our gratitude surges for a loving Father who equips even our weakest 'yes,' making every breath a thanks for His universal offer. In this shared awe, may we both live as debtors to mercy, serving one another with joyful hearts.

### **3. Comfort and Purpose in Suffering**

This doctrine assures believers that trials are not random but woven into God's sovereign plan for their good and His glory (Romans 8:28; Job 42:2), providing supernatural comfort in grief, illness, or injustice. It reframes pain as redemptive, empowering endurance and even joy, as seen in Paul's thorn (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

**Conditional Election Response:** The Unconditionalist comfort in suffering glorifies the God who turns ashes to beauty (Isaiah 61:3), and Conditionalists share that hope deeply. Conditional Election offers parallel solace: Amid trials, God's responsive grace invites us to cast cares on Him (1 Peter 5:7), knowing He honors our faith-filled cries with sustaining power (James 1:2-4), just as He did for Job or the psalmists. Purpose emerges not despite our choices but through them, as we partner with His wooing love. Conditionalists believe that both views can comfort the

afflicted with the gospel's promise that our compassionate Father works all for those who love Him, in every circumstance.

## **4. Boldness in Evangelism and Missions**

Knowing God ordains both the ends (salvation of the elect) and means (preaching the gospel, 2 Timothy 2:10; Romans 10:14-15), it ignites fearless proclamation without despair over outcomes. Believers evangelize with urgency and optimism, viewing every conversation as potential soil for the Spirit's work, fueling global missions as an act of obedience to the King's decree.

**Conditional Election Response:** This evangelistic zeal honors the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and stirs all Conditionalists. In Conditional Election, boldness arises from the thrilling truth that every soul can respond to the universal call (John 12:32), empowered by prevenient grace that levels the field for all hearers. Conditionalists evangelize not in futility but in hopeful partnership with the Holy Spirit, who woos hearts to faith. The Conditionalist seeks to scatter seed widely, trusting the Sower to reap where He wills, and rejoicing when 'whosoever believes' enters the fold."

## **5. Exalted Worship of God's Sovereign Glory**

Unconditional Election centers worship on God's self-sufficient majesty, His choice displays unrivaled power, wisdom, and love (Romans 9:22-23; Ephesians 1:11-12), untainted by creaturely contributions. This elevates corporate



and personal adoration, making Sunday gatherings electric with awe and daily devotion a symphony of doxology.

**Conditional Election Response:** Conditional Election amplifies worship by portraying a relational Trinity whose glory shines in redeeming responsive children (John 17:22-24), where our faith-mirrored love reflects His invitational heart without diminishing His initiative. Worship becomes a dance of divine-human harmony, exalting the God who delights in our 'yes' as much as our existence. Conditionalists adore the electing King whose foreseen grace makes them trophies of His boundless praise.

In closing, the Unconditional Election view promotes benefits of eternal security, humility, resilience, mission, and adoration, all flowing from a sovereign God.

# CHAPTER 6

## RESPONSES TO COMMON OBJECTIONS TO UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION



*"You really only have two possibilities; either God determines who is redeemed, or man does. That's it... Everything indicates that God does."*

*John MacArthur, from a panel discussion called "Election and Predestination: The Sovereignty of God in Salvation," available from Grace to You (2001).*



As fellow believers seeking to honor Scripture, discussions on Unconditional Election always raise concerning objections from those who hold to the conditional view of election. Below, I outline five common objections, drawn from Conditional Election critiques and broader debates, followed by thoughtful responses grounded in the Unconditional Election view. These aim to clarify without division, reminding us that all sides exalt the same Christ who unites

us (John 17:21). Responses emphasize Scripture's harmony between sovereignty and responsibility.

## **1. Objection: Unconditional Election makes God arbitrary or unfair, implying He predestines some to damnation while arbitrarily choosing others.**

Critics argue this portrays God as a capricious judge who shows favoritism, contradicting His justice (Romans 2:11) and love for the world (John 3:16).

**Unconditional Response:** Far from arbitrariness, Unconditional Election magnifies God's perfect justice and mercy: No one deserves salvation due to universal sinfulness (Romans 3:23), so passing over sinners is just, while electing some to mercy is pure grace (Romans 9:14-18). God's choice isn't based on whims but His wise, eternal plan to display both wrath and glory (Romans 9:22-23), like a potter shaping clay (Romans 9:21). This doesn't "predestine to damnation" but holds all accountable for sin, while exalting His freedom to save whom He wills (Exodus 33:19). It fosters awe: If salvation is unearned, all glory goes to Him, not us.

## **2. Objection: Unconditional Election contradicts God's universal love and desire for all to be saved (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).**

If God elects only some Unconditionally, how can He genuinely will salvation for everyone, making His love seem insincere or limited?

**Unconditional Response:** Unconditional Election distinguishes God's revealed will (His benevolent desire and command for all to repent, as in Ezekiel 18:23) from His decretive will (His sovereign plan that accomplishes specific purposes, Ephesians 1:11). Verses like 1 Timothy 2:4 express God's heart against human sin, not a frustrated wish, He ordains the gospel's universal call precisely to gather the elect from all nations (John 6:37; Revelation 5:9). His love is universal in common grace (Matthew 5:45) and particular in saving grace for the chosen (Ephesians 5:25). This resolves no contradiction but reveals a God whose purposes triumph (Isaiah 46:10), inviting us to trust His deeper wisdom.

### **3. Objection: Unconditional Election undermines human responsibility and free will, making people puppets without genuine choice.**

If election precedes faith, how can we be blamed for unbelief or praised for belief? It seems to negate calls to choose Christ (Joshua 24:15).

**Unconditional Response:** Unconditional Election affirms robust human responsibility: We're accountable for rejecting God because our wills, though enslaved to sin (Romans 6:20), act voluntarily according to our nature (John 3:19; Romans 1:20). God doesn't force compliance but regenerates hearts, freeing the will to embrace Him willingly (Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 6:44), like healing a blind man so he can "freely" see the sun. Faith isn't coerced but enabled as the Spirit's gift (Ephesians 2:8), harmonizing with commands to

believe (Acts 16:31). This elevates responsibility: We preach repentance urgently because God ordains both the ends (salvation) and means (human response), crushing excuses and spurring obedience.

#### **4. Objection: Unconditional Election conflicts with verses emphasizing faith as the condition for salvation (e.g., John 3:16; Romans 10:9).**

Scripture repeatedly ties eternal life to believing, suggesting election is corporate or based on foreseen response, not an Unconditional decree.

**Unconditional Response:** Unconditional Election sees no conflict, faith is the instrument of salvation, but its origin is God's electing grace, not a precondition (Acts 13:48; Philippians 1:29). John 3:16's "whosoever believes" is a sincere universal offer, effectual for the elect whom the Father draws (John 6:37, 65). Romans 10:9 describes the response God ordains in the elect, not the cause of election. Foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 isn't passive foresight but God's intimate, electing love that *\*causes\** faith (1 Peter 1:2; Amos 3:2). This Christ-centered view unites us: Election secures the means (faith) to the end (glorification), ensuring no one boasts while all who call on Him are saved.

#### **5. Objection: Unconditional Election leads to fatalism, discouraging evangelism or holy living since outcomes are predetermined.**

If God has already chosen, why evangelize? It makes it where effort seems futile.

**Unconditional Response:** Unconditional Election ignites evangelism: God commands the gospel's proclamation as the very means He uses to call and save His elect (Romans 10:14-15; 2 Timothy 2:10), every sermon is potential soil for the Spirit's work (Acts 18:9-10). Far from fatalism, it breeds optimism: No soul is beyond hope, as the decree includes human agency (Matthew 28:19-20). For holiness, election motivates perseverance (Titus 2:11-14), as the chosen are predestined to good works (Ephesians 2:10) and secured by Christ's intercession (Hebrews 7:25). History bears this out, Unconditional Election proponents like William Carey and Adoniram Judson pioneered missions. It encourages diligence: Knowing we're chosen for transformation, we run the race with joy (1 Corinthians 9:24).

In all these objections, those who hold to Unconditional Election believe that it doesn't diminish God's love or justice but amplifies them, pointing us to the Cross where sovereignty and invitation meet. As Charles Spurgeon said, "I believe the doctrine of election because I am quite sure that if God had not chosen me I should never have chosen Him." Let's dialogue graciously, remembering our unity in the gospel that saves sinners like us (Galatians 2:20).

# CHAPTER 7

## RESPONSES TO COMMON OBJECTIONS TO CONDITIONAL ELECTION



*“Now, you say, Pastor Rogers, I don’t understand predestination; I don’t understand election; I don’t understand foreknowledge; I don’t understand all of this. Well, help yourself; neither do I. And there’s not a person in this room who does, and not anybody out there who does. And you know how I know? The apostle Paul didn’t know. He says, Who can understand this? Who has been God’s counselor? His ways are past finding out, so why don’t you quit trying and begin to live by the Word of God, what God has revealed to you. You say, I don’t understand how there can be an election, and God can know ahead of time, and yet man has a free will. Just believe it. It’s not up to you to synthesize these things; it’s not up to you to put these things together. No, you just simply believe.”*

*Adrian Rogers, from the Sermon "Is God through with the Jews?," in Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Ro 11:1.*



Below are five common objections, followed by gracious responses rooted in Conditional Election, designed to edify and unite us in the gospel that saves by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Let's remember, these conversations draw us deeper into the mystery of a pursuing Savior.

### **1. Objection: Conditional Election introduces human merit or works into salvation, elevating faith as a condition that "earns" God's favor.**

Even if faith is non-meritorious, making it the basis for election subtly shifts reliance from God to human decision, contradicting "not of works" (Ephesians 2:9).

**Conditional Response:** Conditional Election safeguards grace's primacy: Faith is never a "work" or merit but the humble, empty-handed reception of God's gift, enabled entirely by prevenient grace that restores our fallen will without earning anything (John 1:12-13; Titus 2:11). Scripture calls us to believe not as a boast but as dependence, "to the one who does not work but believes... his faith is counted as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). God's foreknowledge doesn't spotlight human excellence but His loving anticipation of the Spirit-wrought response He initiates



(John 6:44, applied universally). This view humbles us further: If grace draws all, our "yes" glorifies the Caller, not the called, fostering joyful obedience as fruit, not root.

## **2. Objection: Conditional Election undermines God's absolute sovereignty by making election dependent on changeable human choices.**

Foreseen faith renders God reactive, limiting His freedom to decree Unconditionally and portraying sovereignty as contingent on creatures (Ephesians 1:11).

**Conditional Response:** Conditional Election exalts God's sovereignty as the masterful orchestration of all things, including free human responses, He foreknows and permits choices without being bound by them, working "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11) while preserving genuine relationality (Acts 17:27-28).

Foreknowledge isn't passivity but divine omniscience that elects based on faith in Christ, the sovereignly appointed means (1 Corinthians 1:30). This doesn't diminish God but magnifies His wisdom: A King who invites voluntary love (Hosea 11:8-9) triumphs eternally, as His grace ensures the elect's faith endures (Philippians 1:6). It encourages trust in a God whose purposes embrace both decree and dialogue, inviting us into covenant partnership.

## **3. Objection: Conditional Election conflicts with total depravity, assuming humans can freely respond to grace without prior regeneration.**

Dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), no one seeks God (Romans 3:11); prevenient grace implies a universal halfway restoration that borders on denying depravity's depth (John 6:44).

**Conditional Response:** Conditional Election fully affirms total depravity, humanity's willful rebellion renders us unable to choose God on our own (Romans 8:7-8), but prevenient grace is God's merciful remedy, the illuminating, convicting work of the Spirit extended to all (John 16:8; Titus 2:11-12), softening hearts like dew before the dawn without forcing assent. Regeneration follows faith as the climactic gift (Colossians 2:13), not precedes it, harmonizing with calls to believe (Acts 16:31). This doesn't deny sin's grip but celebrates God's kindness leading to repentance (Romans 2:4), restoring just enough freedom to respond without coercion. It stirs hope: No one is irredeemable, as grace levels the field for the gospel's universal reach.

**4. Objection: Foreseen faith creates an infinite regress, what causes the faith that God foresees? Conditional Election doesn't truly ground election in grace.**

If faith is foreseen, its source becomes unclear, risking a cycle where human difference, not divine initiative, determines salvation (1 Corinthians 4:7).

**Conditional Response:** Conditional Election grounds everything in grace: Prevenient grace universally enables the

possibility of faith, breaking any regress by being God's prior, unmerited initiative that awakens response without guaranteeing it (John 12:32; Acts 17:27). Foreknowledge elects those whose faith, itself a gracious gift (Ephesians 2:8), unites them to Christ, the true condition and object (Ephesians 1:4-7). Scripture avoids circles by portraying faith as the Spirit's fruit in fertile soil (Matthew 13:23), not self-generated. This relational dynamic glorifies God as the Author who delights in our willing embrace (Psalm 110:3), resolving mystery in the beauty of cooperative redemption where grace empowers, faith receives, and Christ secures.

## **5. Objection: Conditional Election erodes assurance of salvation, as conditional on ongoing faith, opening the door to doubt and potential loss.**

Tying security to persevering faith fosters fear of apostasy (Hebrews 3:12), unlike the unbreakable decree (John 10:28).

**Conditional Response:** Conditional Election offers robust assurance through Christ's unbreakable promises and the Spirit's sealing (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:38-39), where true, persevering faith, sustained by grace (1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24), evidences genuine election (2 Peter 1:10). Warnings against falling away aren't threats to the elect but gracious means God uses to preserve us (Hebrews 3:14), much like a shepherd calling wandering sheep home. Unlike a decree detached from response, this view makes assurance relational and experiential: We rest in God's faithfulness to complete what He starts (Philippians 1:6), examining our faith not in

terror but gratitude. It empowers confident living, knowing our Savior intercedes eternally for those who abide in Him (Hebrews 7:25).

These responses from Conditional Election highlight a God whose grace invites, empowers, and perfects, complementing Unconditional Election's emphasis on sovereignty with Scripture's calls to believe. Yet, as John Wesley noted, "Though we cannot agree, let us never cease loving one another." Both views converge in the Cross, where election meets invitation. In Christ, we're chosen for love and mission, let's walk worthy of that calling together (Ephesians 4:1).

# CHAPTER 8

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION AND CONDITIONAL ELECTION IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY



*"Let all the 'free-will' in the world do all it can with all its strength; it will never give rise to a single instance of ability to avoid being hardened if God does not give the Spirit, or of meriting mercy if it is left to its own strength."*

*Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will (AD 1525). P 202.*



The doctrines of election, God's sovereign choice of individuals or groups for salvation, have been central to Christian theology since the New Testament, drawing primarily from passages like Romans 8:28-30, Ephesians 1:4-5, and John 3:16. These views represent a tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility,

evolving through key historical debates. Below is a chronological overview of their development.

## **1. Early Church (1st–4th Centuries): Corporate and Conditional Foundations**

The earliest Christian writings reflect a primarily corporate understanding of election, viewing the church as the "new Israel" chosen by God, with individual inclusion dependent on faith, repentance, and perseverance rather than an irrevocable decree. Apostolic Fathers like Clement of Rome (c. AD 70–97) emphasized God's gracious call to a chosen community, but warned that believers could fall away through disobedience, aligning more closely with Conditional Election. In the book of 1 Clement, election is described as God choosing "those who love him through Jesus Christ," with salvation tied to ongoing obedience: "It is those who persevere in obedience to God who will be 'enrolled and included among the number of those who are saved through Jesus Christ'" (1 Clement 58:2). Similarly, 2 Clement (c. AD 70–140) stresses that final salvation requires acknowledging Christ through works and endurance: "If we do the will of Christ, we will find rest; but if we do not, if we disobey his commandments, then nothing will save us from eternal punishment" (2 Clement 6:7).

Pauline texts (e.g., Romans 9) provided scriptural seeds for both views, but early interpretations favored conditional elements, balancing grace with exhortations to believe. This shifted dramatically with Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD), who, in response to Pelagius's emphasis on human free will

(an early and messy conditional view), developed a robust doctrine of Unconditional Election. In works like *On the Predestination of the Saints*, St. Augustine argued that grace is irresistible and election Unconditional, as humans are totally depraved and unable to choose God without divine initiative. He famously stated, "God doesn't choose men because He foresees excellence in them, but 'He makes them excellent because He has chosen them.'" This laid the groundwork for later Unconditional views, though Augustine also affirmed God's desire for universal salvation, creating some interpretive tensions.

## **2. Medieval Period (5th–15th Centuries): Decline and Semi-Pelagian Synthesis**

Augustine's Unconditional predestination influenced early medieval thinkers but gradually waned amid rising Semi-Pelagianism, which blended grace and human cooperation, leaning toward Conditional Election. The Second Council of Orange (529 AD) affirmed aspects of Augustine's grace but allowed for human initiative in responding, fostering a more conditional framework in monastic and scholastic traditions.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) revived Augustinian elements, teaching that election is based on God's foreknowledge but ultimately rooted in His sovereign will, predetermining efficacious grace for the elect. However, dominant medieval views, as in the theology of Peter Abelard or the Franciscan school, emphasized conditional aspects, where merit and foreseen faith play roles in salvation. This era saw election more as a corporate mystery tied to the church's sacraments,

with Unconditional ideas remaining a minority voice until the Reformation.

### **3. Reformation Era (16th Century): Revival of Unconditional Election**

The Protestant Reformation reignited Augustinian predestination. Martin Luther (1483–1546), in his work, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), defended Unconditional Election against Erasmus's conditional free-will emphasis, arguing that human will is enslaved to sin, making grace alone sovereign. John Calvin (1509–1564) systematized this in his foundational work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 onward), portraying election as God's eternal decree choosing some for salvation "not because he foresaw that they would be fit recipients of mercy, but in order that they might be fit recipients." Calvin's view, codified in the Belgic Confession (1561), became the hallmark of Reformed theology.

### **4. Arminian Challenge and the Quinquarticular Controversy (Late 16th–Early 17th Centuries): Rise of Conditional Election**

Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), a student of John Calvin, began questioning strict Unconditional Election, teaching instead that God's election is based on foreseen faith: "The scriptures know no election by which God precisely and absolutely has determined to save anyone without having first considered him as a believer." After



Arminius's death, his followers (Remonstrants) issued the *Five Articles of Remonstrance* (1610), asserting Conditional Election conditioned on persevering faith, enabled by universal prevenient grace. This view emphasized God's foreknowledge (Romans 8:29) and universal salvific will (1 Timothy 2:4), contrasting Calvinism's Unconditional Election.

Arminius's followers later became known as Arminians, and their push for Conditional Election led to the Quinquarticular controversy of the 17th century. This dispute between Calvinists and Arminians centered over five points of doctrine: predestination, the extent of the atonement, the nature of human will and sin, the irresistibility of God's grace, and the perseverance of saints. This conflict started in the Netherlands and England, with the Arminian *Five Articles of Remonstrance* causing great controversy and even a major schism within Protestantism.

The controversy culminated at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), where Reformed leaders rejected Arminianism and affirmed Unconditional Election as the second "point" of the TULIP acronym (Total depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints.), stating: "Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath out of mere grace... chosen... a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ." Dort's Canons became a cornerstone of Reformed confessions, including the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) and the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

## **5. Post-Reformation Developments (17th–19th Centuries): Divergence and Popularization**

Unconditional Election solidified in Puritan and Presbyterian traditions, influencing figures like Jonathan Edwards, who wrote: "God doesn't choose men because He foresees excellence in them, but 'He makes them excellent because He has chosen them.'" Conditional Election gained traction through John Wesley (1703–1791), who, in Methodism, promoted Arminianism as emphasizing free grace and universal atonement, leading to its spread in evangelical revivals and holiness movements. By the 19th century, Conditional views dominated in Baptist, Methodist, and Anabaptist circles, while Unconditional views held in Reformed and Presbyterian and some Baptist groups.

## **6. Modern Era (20th–21st Centuries): Ongoing Dialogue and Ecumenism**

Today, Unconditional Election thrives in Reformed denominations (e.g., Presbyterian Church in America [PCA], The Lutheran Church, and in many Baptist congregations) and theologians like R.C. Sproul, who describe it as God electing "according to the sovereign good pleasure of his own will." Conditional Election persists in Arminian/Wesleyan traditions (e.g., Assemblies of God, Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches and the Nazarene Church), with proponents like Roger Olson arguing it centers election "on Christ by making it conditional on union with him." Ecumenical efforts, such as the 1970s Lausanne Covenant, seek common ground, affirming election while downplaying

divisions. Debates continue in academia and online, often framed around total depravity and free will.

In summary, Unconditional Election emerged as a response to perceived threats to grace (Pelagius, Arminius), emphasizing sovereignty, while Conditional Election arguments arose to safeguard human responsibility and God's love for all. Both views have shaped Christianity profoundly, fostering missions, piety, and theological depth, though they remind us that election ultimately glorifies a mysterious God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

# CHAPTER 9

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION AND CONDITIONAL ELECTION IN SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORY



*“Election is God’s eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life-not because of foreseen merit in them, but of his mere mercy in Christ-in consequence of which choice they are called, justified, and glorified.”*

*James Petigru Boyce, the founding President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from his work, Abstract of Systematic Theology (1887).*



Unlike many Christian denominations that have fractured over divergent views on election, whether Unconditional or conditional, the Southern Baptist Convention, America's largest Protestant body, stands out for its inclusive embrace of believers from both traditions. The doctrines of

Unconditional Election and Conditional Election have long shaped Southern Baptist theology.

Southern Baptists inherited a dual heritage from two pre-convention streams: the Charleston tradition (Unconditional Election) and the Sandy Creek Tradition (Conditional Election). This duality persisted after the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was founded in 1845, evolving through revivalism, theological shifts, and modern debates. Below is a chronological overview of the history of Unconditional Election and Conditional Election in the Southern Baptist Convention.

## **1. Pre-Convention Roots: The Charleston and Sandy Creek Streams (Mid-18th Century)**

Southern Baptist identity emerged from two contrasting Baptist associations in the colonial South, representing the Unconditional and Conditional poles.

### **A. The Charleston Baptist Association (Founded 1751):**

Centered in South Carolina, this group traced its roots to English Particular Baptists, who emphasized Calvinistic soteriology. Influenced by the 1689 London Baptist Confession, Charleston Baptists affirmed Unconditional Election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace as core to salvation by grace alone. Their confessional approach prioritized doctrinal precision, viewing election as God's eternal, sovereign decree selecting individuals for redemption in Christ without human precondition. Leaders like Oliver Hart promoted missions and education, and John Broadus

and James P. Boyce sought to provide a rigorous doctrinal foundation Southern Baptists. It was the out of the Charleston tradition that the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was established (1859) This stream contributed to a structured, theologically rigorous Baptist ethos and produced such amazing baptist leaders as Lottie Moon, William Johnson (the 1st president of the Southern Baptist Convention) and John Broadus who wrote the top book on preaching in print: *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.

### **B. Sandy Creek Baptist Association (Founded 1758):**

Established in North Carolina by Shubal Stearns, a former New England Separate Baptist, this association embodied a revivalistic, Arminian-leaning tradition influenced by General Baptists. Sandy Creek emphasized Conditional Election, general atonement, and human moral ability to respond to the gospel through free will, enabled by God's universal grace. They rejected strict predestination, seeing election as God's foreknowledge of faith, and prioritized personal conversion over creeds. This "Separate Baptist" fervor spread rapidly through the backcountry, prioritizing liberty of conscience and anti-authoritarian zeal.

During these years, these streams coexisted uneasily: Charleston represented educated, urban Calvinism; Sandy Creek represented populist, rural Arminianism. By the early 19th century, they converged in state conventions, blending Unconditional doctrinal anchors with conditional evangelistic fire, setting the stage for the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention.

## **2. Founding of the Southern Baptist Convention (1845) and Early Tensions**

The SBC was established in Augusta, Georgia, amid the national Baptist split over slavery, but its soteriology drew from both streams. Founders like Basil Manly Sr. and James P. Boyce, both from the Charleston Stream, infused early documents with Unconditional elements. The SBC's first confession, the Baptist Faith and Message, affirmed God's "eternal purpose" in election without specifying conditions, allowing latitude. Southern Seminary's Abstract of Principles (1858) explicitly echoed Unconditional Election: "Election is the eternal purpose of God, according to which He graciously regenerates, sanctifies and glorifies sinners." Early SBC leaders, including Boyce, defended Unconditional Election against perceived Conditional Election excesses, viewing it as safeguarding grace.

Yet, Sandy Creek's legacy ensured conditional emphases thrived in frontier revivals. Associational life reflected this duality: Urban churches leaned Unconditional Election, while rural ones stressed conditional response. By the late 19th century, Unconditional Election dominated seminaries and missions boards, but conditional views fueled mass evangelism, as seen in the work of Ann Judson and Luther Rice.

### **3. 20th Century Shifts: Decline of Calvinism and Arminian Ascendancy**

The early 20th century saw Unconditional Election wane amid modernist-fundamentalist battles and revivalism. Influences like Charles G. Finney's Arminian theology and Billy Sunday's campaigns amplified Conditional Election, portraying salvation as a free human choice enabled by universal grace.

In Southern Baptist life, E.Y. Mullins, president of Southern Seminary from 1899-1928, presided over the Baptist Faith and Message 1925 committee. Pushing against Southern Seminary's founders who defended Unconditional Election, Mullins led the seminary and the denomination into a more robust view of Conditional Election. By mid-century, SBC statements like the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message softened predestination language, emphasizing "God's purpose of grace" without Unconditional specifics, accommodating Sandy Creek-style evangelism.

The post-WWII era marked a low point for Unconditional Election as theological education shifted more toward dispensationalism and decisionism, with Conditional Election dominant in preaching. Historians note that by the 1960s, Arminian-leaning views, stressing free will and general atonement, prevailed in most SBC pulpits, diluting Unconditional emphases amid cultural optimism and growth-focused pragmatism.



## 4. Conservative Resurgence and Unconditional Election Resurgence (1979–Present)

The Conservative Resurgence (1979–1990s), led by figures like Adrian Rogers and Paige Patterson, reclaimed biblical inerrancy but also revived Unconditional Election through Reformed influences. Al Mohler (Southern Seminary president from 1993) reframed SBC heritage as predominantly supportive of Unconditional Election, arguing the Charleston stream was foundational to the convention and to Southern Seminary. Mohler stated in 2006 that all Southern Baptists are "one form of Calvinists or another" in affirming grace's primacy. This "New Calvinism" gained traction via the Founders Ministries (1982), young Unconditional Election Southern Baptist leaders like David Platt and Matt Chandler emerged, and books like *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Edwin H. Palmer were written to support these interests.

Tensions resurfaced in the 2010s with the Southern Baptist Convention appointing an "Calvinism Advisory Committee" (2012), which brought together leaders from both the Conditional Election and Unconditional Election views. Their research and study affirmed both views as compatible within Southern Baptist belief but urged unity. The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message revision balanced sovereignty ("God... predestines") with responsibility ("whosoever will"). Debates peaked around two major developments: 1. The 2008 John 3:16 Conference and 2. The 2012 "Traditional Statement," a Conditional Election defense by Eric Hankins,

critiquing Unconditional views as implying double predestination.

The inaugural John 3:16 Conference convened November 6–7, 2008, at First Baptist Church Woodstock, Georgia, hosted by my home church retired pastor Dr. Jerry Vines. It was billed as a "biblical and theological assessment of and response to five-point Calvinism." Attendance at the conference was around 1000 people, while conferences marketed to Southern Baptists that were supportive of Unconditional Election saw record attendance north of 5000 people each (G3 Conference 2019, over 5000 people; T4G Conference 2018, over 12,000 people).

Recent years have shown incredible moments of unity from leaders of both views, but some online and associational divides persist, with Unconditional Election stronger in urban, seminary-trained circles and Conditional Election stronger in rural ones.

## **5. Lifeway Research on the Impact of Calvinism in the SBC**

Lifeway Research, the SBC's polling arm, has tracked Unconditional Election's influence, revealing a balanced but evolving landscape. Their landmark 2012 survey of 1,000 SBC pastors found near parity: 30% identified their churches as Unconditional Election/Reformed (up from 10% five-point in 2006 to 16%), 30% as Arminian/Wesleyan, and 40% as "neither." Pastors across views agreed on evangelism's urgency, countering fears of fatalism.

A 2010 Lifeway analysis noted Calvinism's 30-year growth, attributing it to seminary reforms and cultural shifts toward confessionalism. By 2013, about 30% of pastors self-identified as supporting Unconditional Election, with impacts including higher emphasis on expository preaching and church discipline but occasional friction over "altar calls." No major new Lifeway surveys emerged by 2025, but ongoing tracking indicates stability: reporting that the Unconditional Election view fosters theological rigor and missions commitment (e.g., via the International Mission Board), while Conditional views drive broader appeal and revivalism. Overall, 80% of pastors view the debate as non-divisive, affirming SBC's "big tent" ethos.

In summary, Southern Baptist view of election mirrors its dual heritage, Charleston's Unconditional sovereignty tempering Sandy Creek's conditional zeal, producing a resilient, evangelistic movement. While debates endure, both views exalt Christ-centered grace, as urged in the 2012 committee report: "The gospel of Jesus Christ is our unifying message."

# CHAPTER 10

## UNIFYING THOUGHTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS WHO HOLD TO CONDITIONAL ELECTION AND UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION



*"I think reformed theology has done and good for us... it's taught us to take a high view of God and there's nothing ever wrong with that. I believe that whether you feel like you were drafted or whether you feel like you volunteered, the general says we're in the same foxhole and so we need to understand that we are in a battle here together"*

*Pastor Ken Whitten, from a 2019 Southern Baptist Convention Panel entitled "God Above All: Keeping Secondary Issues Secondary." Remarks spoken at minute 32.*



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in a world quick to divide, our differences on election, whether Conditional or Unconditional, pale before the glory of our shared Savior. Both views stem from a passion for Scripture's truths on grace, sovereignty, and human response, and they converge in exalting Jesus as the heart of salvation. As Paul urges, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Below are seven unifying thoughts, drawn from common ground in God's Word, designed to encourage and edify us all. Each reminds us that we're co-laborers in the gospel, not rivals.

## **1. Salvation Is Entirely by Grace Through Faith in Christ Alone**

Both traditions agree that no human effort or merit initiates or secures salvation, it's God's gift, not our achievement (Ephesians 2:8-9). For Unconditionalists, grace sovereignly elects and enables faith; for Conditionalists, grace universally enables a free response of faith. Either way, we boast only in the Cross, fostering profound gratitude and freedom from performance anxiety.

## **2. Election Is Rooted in God's Eternal Love for a Redeemed People "In Christ"**

Scripture unites us by placing all election "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3-4), where the chosen are a diverse multitude from every nation (Revelation 5:9). Unconditionalists see this

as God's particular choice securing the elect; Conditionalists as God's foreknown plan embracing all who believe. This shared focus draws our eyes to Jesus, the true Elect One, inspiring worship of His inclusive, sacrificial love.

### **3. God's Sovereignty and Human Responsibility Coexist in Holy Mystery**

The Bible holds divine foreordination (Romans 8:29-30) alongside urgent calls to repent and believe (Acts 17:30; John 3:16), without contradiction. Unconditionalists emphasize sovereignty's assurance; Conditionalists highlight responsibility's dignity. Together, this mystery humbles us all.

### **4. Evangelism Is Our Joyful Mandate, Empowered by the Spirit**

Whether through ordained means for the elect (2 Timothy 2:10) or universal invitation (Matthew 28:19-20), both views propel us to proclaim the gospel to every creature. Unconditionalists find hope in God's effectual call; Conditionalists in prevenient grace's reach. This unites us in missions, celebrating souls saved by the same message: "Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish" (John 3:16).

### **5. Assurance Flows from Christ's Finished Work and Our Perseverance in Faith**

-  
True security rests not in doctrinal precision but in union with Christ, who keeps us to the end (John 10:28-29;

Philippians 1:6). Unconditionalists trust the decree's unbreakability; Conditionalists the Spirit's sustaining enablement (2 Peter 1:10). Both call us to "examine ourselves" in love, yielding encouragement: Our Savior's grip is sure, fueling resilient joy amid trials.

## **6. These Doctrines Cultivate Humility and Dependence on God**

Unconditional Election crushes boasting by grace alone; Conditional Election humbles by crediting even faith to God's enabling work (Ephesians 2:8). In both, we're "unworthy servants" (Luke 17:10), dependent on the Vine (John 15:5). This shared posture encourages mutual edification: Let's spur one another to holy living, free from pride or despair.

## **7. God's Ways Are Higher, Our Unity Glorifies Him More Than Agreement**

We won't fully resolve election's tensions this side of glory (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9), but debating in grace sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). Both sides can rejoice: Our fellowship testifies to the gospel's power, drawing outsiders to Christ. As one body, let's prioritize "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:8).

In these truths, we find not compromise but completion, each view enriching the other, all pointing to the Lamb who was slain. Whether you see election as drafted by decree or enlisted by faith, we're all soldiers in the same victorious army, advancing the kingdom together. Let's embrace this

encouragement: In Christ, we're eternally chosen for unity (John 17:21).



# CHAPTER 11

## FINAL CONCLUSION



*"If we stand together in truth, we can trust one another in truth, even as we experience tension. We can talk like brothers and sisters in Christ, and we can work urgently and eagerly together."*

*From the SBC Calvinism Advisory Committee (SBC, 2013) and a report entitled: "Truth, Trust, and Testimony in a Time of Tension."*



We've journeyed far, and if you are reading this, you have survived the journey. We have gone from passages in the Bible, to benefits, to objections, to history, and to unity. Whether Conditional Election or Unconditional Election tugs your heart (or you're still pondering), one thing's clear: We serve the same risen King. Jesus died for rebels like us and

we are duty bound to seek His glory in the earth and His unity within the church.

I have personally been thankful to be a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, where reflective study of this issue and a resulting decision on the doctrine of election does not warrant a need to change denominations. I have had times in my life where I have shifted in my views on election, and I am thankful to be in a safe denomination no matter where I land.

To the question of where I stand today on the issue, I tread with great caution. I was raised a strict Conditionalist who was ready to fight for my views with confidence and vigor. Under the leadership of Dr. Jerry Vines, I was instilled with a warm and robust view of man's responsibility and the need to go and evangelize the world. Later, under the leadership of Al Mohler at Southern Seminary, I was introduced to professors and pastors who held to a humble view of Unconditional Election. I graduated from Southern a more humble Conditionalist.

After graduating from Southern Seminary, I spent years reading through argumentation for both views. While I am thankful for the ministries of John Piper, Voddie Baucham, Allistair Begg, John MacArthur, R.C. Sproul, and Charles Spurgeon, all great men who hold to the Unconditional Election view, it was not their works that helped me form a decision. For that, I credit Paul in Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 for forming my personal views on election.

During a sustained season of quiet times, I worked through exegesis of both chapters and came to the conclusion that Paul's arguments make the greatest sense supporting Unconditional Election. Today, I hold to a Southern Baptist view of Unconditional Election with great love and respect for any who differ with me. My passion for evangelism and world missions has only grown deeper with time, and I am perpetually thankful for the preachers, mentors, and friends on both sides of this issue who have loved me and the Gospel.

Wherever you may land on election, let's Go together and tell the world: God has chosen to save through Christ!

For His Kingdom and Glory,

Dr. David Crowe

# APPENDIX A

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY



*"That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory to each other... I do not believe they can ever be welded into one upon any earthly anvil, but they certainly shall be one in eternity. They are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the human mind which pursues them farthest will never discover that they converge, but they do converge, and they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God."*

*Charles H. Spurgeon, from his essay "A Defence of Calvinism," originally published in the April 1856 issue of The Sword and the Trowel.*



## **1. My personal overall recommended books on Conditional and Unconditional Election:**

**1. R.C. Sproul**, *Chosen by God* (1986, Tyndale House). I read Sproul's book when I was a staunch holder of the conditional view, and I loved how helpful he was to show me a generous and loving explanation of the Unconditional Election view. If I could recommend only one book for all Christians to read on this topic, it would be Sproul's book.

**2. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner**, *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* (2008 B&H Publishing group). This is my top book for Southern Baptist History and unity on the matters that concern Unconditional and Conditional Election. Warmly written by men on both sides and with a humility and clarity for moving forward together, this is the book I recommend for any Southern Baptist concerned about the issues raised by this discussion.

**3. J. I. Packer**, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (2012 Intervarsity Press). In this book, Packer steps into the discussion on election and applies the word "Antimony." He defines "antinomy" as "an appearance of contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary" (p. 18). It "is neither dispensable nor comprehensible...It is unavoidable and insoluble. We do not invent it, and we cannot explain it" (p. 21). God "orders and controls all things, human actions among them"...yet "He holds every man responsible for the choices he makes and the courses of action he pursues" (p. 22). "To our finite minds this is inexplicable" (p. 23). Packer then proceeds to fuel our

passion evangelism from a perspective of God's Sovereignty that encourages me to go forward and witness.

## **2. My personal recommended books on better understanding Calvinism/Reformed Theology**

So much of this debate in our day centers on the topic of Calvinism and Reformed Theology. Just the word "Calvinism" can be such a confusing, angering, and divisive topic to discuss, where education on the matter would be advisable for all Southern Baptists. I have found the following resources to be especially helpful to me in understanding the modern resurgence and perspective on Calvinism and Reformed Theology:

**1. David H. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*.** This is the one resource I recommend to all who have asked me for a book to better understand Calvinism. I like how the book presents each major claim of Calvinism and deals directly with passages in the Bible that seem to support those claims.

**2. R.C. Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?*** Understanding the Basics by R.C. Sproul (1997, Ligonier Ministries). This engaging primer unpacks the TULIP acronym with clear explanations and Scripture, making complex ideas approachable. Ideal for newcomers; Sproul's teaching style demystifies sovereignty without overwhelming the reader.

### **3. John MacArthur, *The Doctrines of Grace Sermon Series*.**

(available for free at [gtty.org](http://gtty.org)) In Pastor John's usual style, he addresses these difficult doctrines in a warm and clear manner. Of particular focus to this series, MacArthur delivers three messages on the doctrine of election (From sermons preached on September 19, September 26, and October 17, 2004). All of this available directly online at <https://www.gty.org/sermons/series/280/the-doctrines-of-grace>

## **3. An Annotated Bibliography on the Conditional View of Election for Southern Baptists:**

**1. David L. Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood, *Anyone Can Be Saved: A Defense of "Traditional" Southern Baptist Soteriology*.** (2019, Wipf and Stock Publishers). A collaborative work by SBC seminary professors defending Conditional Election as the historic SBC majority view, rooted in foreknowledge and free grace. It critiques Unconditional Election's implications for evangelism and God's character; strengths include accessible exegesis and SBC-specific applications, like altar calls. Suitable level for pastors and laypeople to read, this would be my one top recommended resource to better understand the Southern Baptist Conditional Election view.

**2. David L. Allen, and Steve W. Lemke (eds.), *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of the Two Most Significant Southern Baptist Statements on Election*.** (2010, B&H Academic). Essays from a conference founded by the pastor that ordained me, Dr. Jerry Vines. His 2008 John 3:16 Conference, explored Conditional Election via the 1925 and

2000 Baptist Faith and Message, with responses to Calvinist views. The book highlights universal grace and foreseen faith; its multi-author format offers balanced dialogue, making it a key resource for SBC unity. I sat for 14 years under the preaching of Dr. Vines, and I am eternally grateful for his impact on my life and for helping to develop my love for expository preaching.

**3. Leighton Flowers**, *The Potter's Promise: A Biblical Defense of Traditional Soteriology*. (2017, Weaver Book Company). An ex-SBC seminary student's apologetic for Conditional Election, using Romans 9 to argue God's justice in offering salvation to all responders. Strengths lie in conversational style and SBC context. It has quite an interesting critique of Founders Ministries - an UnconConditional Election group within the SBC). It is more polemical in its writing.

**4. J Matthew Pinson**, *Arminian and Baptist: Explorations in a Theological Tradition*. (2015, Randall House Publications). Historical essays tracing Arminian (conditional) election in General and Free Will Baptist traditions, including SBC precursors like Sandy Creek. Pinson bridges Reformation roots with evangelicalism; its scholarly yet irenic tone suits SBC readers seeking confessional depth without Unconditional Election leanings.

**5. Ronnie W Rogers**, *Soteriology Simplified: Conversionism Instead of Calvinism Transformed*. (2017, WestBow Press). A non-Calvinist SBC pastor's primer on Conditional Election as "conversionism," emphasizing faith's role in response to universal grace. Includes practical SBC applications for



preaching; concise and encouraging for lay leaders, with strong scriptural focus on free will.

**6. Steve W. Lemke, and David L. Allen (eds.),** *Perspectives on Election: Five Views on God's Choice of the Elect*. (2019, B&H Academic). Multi-view book featuring SBC Traditionalist (conditional) perspectives alongside Unconditional Election views, with responses. Allen's chapter defends foreseen faith.

**7. Eric Hankins (ed.),** *A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation*. (2012, self-published via the 2012 Traditionalist Statement). A concise doctrinal statement affirming Conditional Election, with explanatory articles by SBC leaders like Paige Patterson. Though short, its annotations clarify SBC heritage; a foundational document for non-Calvinists.

**8. Tom Ascol, and Paige Patterson (contributors),** *The SBC and the 21st Century: The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention*. (1991, Broadman Press; relevant excerpts). Includes non-Calvinist defenses of Conditional Election in SBC polity discussions; Patterson's input stresses free grace. Dated but valuable for historical context, showing conditional views' pre-resurgence strength in SBC leadership.

**9. Roger E. Olson,** *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. (2006, InterVarsity Press). While general, it addresses SBC applications, debunking myths about Conditional Election and affirming its compatibility with Baptist confessions. Olson's clarity on foreknowledge and prevenient grace;

recommended for SBC readers via its ecumenical appeal and critique of hyper-Calvinism.

**10. Robert E Picirilli**, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism*. (2002, Randall House Publications). A Baptist Arminian classic comparing Conditional Election to Calvinism, with SBC-relevant emphasis on missions. Picirilli's verse-by-verse analysis is helpful to readers trying to understand Conditional Election exegesis more thoroughly.

#### **4. An Annotated Bibliography on the Unconditional View of Election for Southern Baptists:**

**1. Robert B. Selph**, *Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election*. (1998, Hess Publications). A historical survey documenting Unconditional Election's roots in Baptist confessions (e.g., 1689 London) and early SBC figures like Basil Manly. Selph argues it fueled missions without fatalism; strengths include archival quotes and SBC applications; essential for affirming confessional heritage amid modern debates. This is a short book and straightforward book that helped me see the scope and brevity for the Unconditional Election view in all of Southern Baptist History.

**2. Thomas J. Nettles**, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*. (1986, Baker Books; rev. ed. 2002, Founders Press). Comprehensive defense of Calvinistic soteriology, including Unconditional Election, through Baptist

history from Puritans to SBC founders. Nettles shows election's role in evangelism; its exegetical depth and biographical vignettes make it a cornerstone for SBC seminarians.

**3. Tom Ascol**, *A Southern Baptist Looks at the Biblical Doctrine of Election*. (2000, Founders Press). A concise, Scripture-saturated essay defining Unconditional Election as God's merciful choice "not because of foreseen merit," with implications for assurance and preaching. Ascol, Founders Ministries founder, ties it to SBC confessions; accessible and pastoral, ideal for church libraries.

**4. Jim Orrick**, *Mere Calvinism*. (2019, B&H Academic). An irenic introduction to the five points, with a chapter on Unconditional Election as God's glory-displaying purpose (Romans 9). Orrick uses illustrations to counter misconceptions; SBC-published and reviewed positively by Founders, it's perfect for bridging Reformed theology with SBC evangelism.

**5. Tom Ascol**, *Calvinism Foundational for Evangelism and Missions*. (2012, Founders Press). Argues Unconditional Election undergirds bold proclamation, as God ordains means alongside ends (2 Timothy 2:10). Draws on SBC missionaries like Luther Rice; concise booklet with historical SBC examples, strengthening the case against "fatalism" charges.

**6. Thomas J. Nettles, and Russell Moore**, *Why I Am a Baptist*. (2005, B&H Publishing). Essays defending Baptist distinctives, including Unconditional Election as safeguarding

grace in the Abstract of Principles (1858). Moore and Nettles link it to SBC identity; engaging and doctrinal, useful for young leaders in mixed soteriological churches. While many Southern Baptists have lost their appreciation for Dr. Moore and his questionable exit of the SBC (to become the editor of Christianity Today Magazine), his contribution to this book is still recommended reading.

**7. Tom Ascol, (ed.),** *Traditional Theology & the SBC*. (2019, Founders Press). Critique of the 2012 Traditional Statement, defending Unconditional Election against conditional critiques, emphasizing foreknowledge as electing love (1 Peter 1:2). SBC-focused responses promote unity; timely for post-Resurgence debates, with scriptural rebuttals.

**8. Thomas J. Nettles,** *The Baptists: Volume 1 – Beginnings in Britain* (2005, Mentor). Traces Calvinistic election in early Particular Baptists influencing SBC; volume highlights doctrinal fortitude. Nettles' narrative style; part of a three-volume set, is valuable for historical grounding in Charleston-style theology. Tom Nettles was my Baptist History professor at Southern Seminary, and he teaches today at Founders Seminary.

**9. Thomas R. Schreiner, and Bruce A. Ware (eds.),** *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*. (2000, Baker Books). Essays by SBC scholars (e.g., Schreiner) defending Unconditional Election via exegesis of Romans 8-9 and Ephesians 1. Addresses free will compatibilism; rigorous yet accessible, reflecting Southern Seminary's Reformed resurgence. I had

both professors multiple times during my Masters's of Divinity degree at Southern Seminary and I was able to read and discuss this book with them when it was first printed.

**10. Daniel Montgomery, and Timothy Paul Jones, *PROOF: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace*.** (2014, Zondervan). Reformulates the TULIP acronym for modern readers, with Unconditional Election as God's initiating joy (John 6:44). SBC co-author Jones ties it to Baptist life; fresh, narrative-driven approach counters anti Unconditional Election narratives.

# APPENDIX B

## COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 9 FROM THE CONDITIONAL ELECTION AND UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION VIEWS



*"How,' says some one, 'do you reconcile these two doctrines?' My dear brethren, I never reconcile two friends, never. These two doctrines are friends with one another; for they are both in God's Word, and I shall not attempt to reconcile them. If you show me that they are enemies, then I will reconcile them. 'But,' says one, 'there is a great deal of difficulty about them.' Will you tell me what truth there is that has not difficulty about it? 'But,' he says, 'I do not see it.' Well, I do not ask you to see it; I ask you to believe it. There are many things in God's Word that are difficult, and that I cannot see, but they are there, and I believe them."*

*Charles H. Spurgeon, From the Sermon: "Jacob and Esau" (on Romans 9:13).*



Since much of the the discussion on election centers on Romans 9, I thought it fitting to add an appendix of commentary from both views on this difficult chapter. No doubt, readers of this book will see a bit of a retread of already discussed information, but I believe to have the commentary from both views in one appendix will prove beneficial.

I will begin with commentary from the Conditional Election view, with accessible Study Bibles to check for further research, and then I will counter with commentary and suggestions from the Unconditional viewpoint. In both cases, I will include the full text of Romans 9 from the ESV translation of the Bible.

## **1. Commentary for Romans 9 from the Conditional Election view.**

*Romans 9:1-5 I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

Paul grieves that most ethnic Israelites have rejected the Messiah even though they were the original covenant people.

The problem, they say, is not that God's promise failed but that belonging to Israel never automatically guaranteed salvation. The "people of the promise" are those who exercise faith as Abraham did.

*6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."*

The Conditional View takes "Israel" in v. 6b to mean the faithful remnant. God's election, they say, is conditional on faith: Israel's failure shows that membership in the covenant community was never enough; only those who believe become the true heirs of the promise (compare 9:30-33).

*10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls, 12 she was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."*



Instead of reading God's choice of Jacob as an individual election to salvation, the conditional reading views it as a corporate or vocational election of nations (Israel and Edom) to serve God's redemptive plan. God decided that Jacob's line would carry the covenant, but whether individual descendants share in the final blessing depends on their faith response.

So, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" expresses God's historical preference for one nation over another, not the eternal destiny of individuals.

***14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.***

Here, "conditionalists" say Paul anticipates the charge that God is unfair for choosing one nation to advance His purpose. God's "mercy on whom I will have mercy" (v. 15) is interpreted as His right to set the conditions of mercy, namely, faith.

Pharaoh's hardening (vv. 17-18) demonstrates that persistent unbelief brings judicial hardening, not that God created Pharaoh for condemnation. In this view the hardening is responsive, not decreative.

*19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? 22 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, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?*

Conditional Election interpreters see this as a metaphor for God’s right to reshape Israel rather than a proof of predestination of individuals to heaven or hell. Israel, the “clay,” resists, and God patiently endures them, waiting for repentance. The “vessels of mercy” are those, Jew or Gentile, who accept the gospel conditions of faith.

*25 As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ ” 26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ” 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” 29 And as Isaiah*

*predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”*

Conditional interpreters say Paul uses these Old-Testament passages to show that God’s covenant membership always rested on faith, not ethnicity. By believing the gospel, Gentiles become the “people of God,” while unbelieving Jews are temporarily cut off. Again, this election is corporate and conditional.

*30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

This section is the anchor for the conditional reading. It explicitly contrasts faith with works of the law. Therefore, they argue the entire chapter’s purpose is ethical and covenantal, not metaphysical: Israel stumbled because they pursued righteousness “as if it were by works,” whereas Gentiles attained it “through faith.”

God’s choosing, they conclude, always hinges on whether people respond in faith to His revealed promise.

## **2. Accessible Study Bibles for Romans 9 from the Conditional view for further research.**

**A. The Tony Evans Study Bible** - This is one of my favorite study Bibles of all time. Dr. Evans does an amazing job simplifying difficult doctrines and explaining scripture. I consult his bible every time I study any passage. Dr. Evans holds to a classic view of Conditional Election and his notes on Romans 9 are very readable and helpful.

**B. The Life Application Study Bible** - This was my first real study Bible and it has a special place in my heart. Readable at a middle school/high school level, the notes are especially helpful for living out the Bible in daily life. The notes for Romans 9 are assistive in better understanding the Conditional Election view.

**C. Wesley Study Bible** - Founder of the Methodist church, Wesley's notes provide a classic and historic explanation from the Conditional Election View.

D. For even more resources for Conditional Election, be sure to read through the bibliography in appendix A.

## **3. Commentary for Romans 9 from the Unconditional Election view.**

*1 I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off*

*from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

Paul's distress sets the stage for the doctrine of election. Even though Israel possessed every covenant privilege, most of them are lost. This raises a crucial question, has God's promise failed? Paul will show that it has not, because God's saving promise was never intended for all ethnic Israel but for the elect within Israel.

*4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

These verses highlight how blessed Israel was; yet privilege alone does not guarantee salvation. Outward covenant membership never substitutes for the inward call of God's electing grace (cf. Rom 2:28-29).

*6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,*

Here Paul begins his defense: God's word has not failed because the true Israel consists of those elected by God's sovereign grace, not all physical descendants.

The conception of "Israel within Israel" sets the boundary between corporate privilege and individual election.

*7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. 9 For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”*

Both Ishmael and Isaac were Abraham’s sons, but only Isaac was chosen to continue the covenant line. The Unconditional Election reading sees here a pattern of divine discrimination according to sovereign purpose, God selects one, passes by another, to teach that spiritual inheritance depends on His calling, not lineage or effort.

*10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls, 12 she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*

This is the classic text for unconditional election.

Before their birth, before faith, obedience, or sin had entered, God chose Jacob, not Esau, “in order that God’s purpose of election might stand.” The emphasis is causal: election depends solely on “him who calls” (God), not on human will or merit. (See the cross references of Ephesians 1:4–5 | 2 Timothy 1:9 | Malachi 1:2-3)

“Loved” and “hated” are covenantal terms expressing God’s sovereign delight in one and His just rejection of the other. Paul uses it to illustrate individual election and reprobation, not merely a national role.

***14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.***

Paul’s answer: God’s mercy is never owed. Justice would condemn everyone; mercy rescues some. Therefore, “It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” (v. 16)

Unconditional election underscores that salvation originates in divine compassion, not human choosing. The question of injustice on God’s part best makes sense in the interpretation of God’s choice and not man’s.

***17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.***

God sovereignly positioned Pharaoh to display His power and glory. Hardening here is an active divine judgment consistent with Pharaoh’s own sinful will.

This demonstrates God's total freedom: the same sovereignty that shows mercy to the elect also justly confirms the reprobate in their rebellion.

***19 You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?***

Paul forbids the creature from disputing the Creator's right to dispense mercy or justice as He wills. Just as a potter shapes clay into different vessels, God has authority over His creation, including human destinies. He owes mercy to none; He gives it to some to magnify His grace (cf. Isaiah 29:16; Jeremiah 18:6).

**22 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, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?**

Here Paul reveals the divine rationale behind election:  
To display God's wrath and power in His justice.  
To display the riches of His mercy toward the elect.



Both outcomes serve the larger end, God's glory. The "vessels of mercy" are those whom He "prepared beforehand for glory." Preparation is God's eternal decree (Ephesians 1:11).

*25 As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' " 26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.' " 27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, 28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." 29 And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."*

Unconditional election explains both Gentile inclusion and Jewish remnant: salvation always operates by God's free grace, not ethnicity or effort.

Every saved person, Jew or Gentile, is part of that predestined remnant of grace.

*30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling,*

*and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

The contrast sums up the heart of Paul’s argument: The Gentiles believed because God called them effectually. Israel stumbled because they pursued righteousness externally, never seeking mercy.

Yet behind human responding lies the deeper reality, those who believe have been granted mercy by God’s sovereign election.

#### **4. Accessible Study Bibles for Romans 9 from the Conditional view for further research.**

**A. The ESV Study Bible** - This is my favorite study Bible of all time. General editor is JI Packer, and the notes are always thorough and helpful. If you only have the money to purchase one Study Bible, get the ESV Study Bible and you will not be disappointed. The notes for Romans 9 in the ESV Study Bible are exhaustive and assistive for the Unconditional Election view.

**B. The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible** - DA Carson is the general editor and he has put together an incredible team of scholars for this bible. Very thorough and informative, I found the notes from this bible helpful for the Unconditional Election perspective.

**C. .The MacArthur Study Bible** - This comes second only to the ESV Study Bible in regards to its helpfulness and scope.

**D. The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible** - Al Mohler is the editor of this Bible. Great resource for the big picture of each paragraph of scripture rather than a verse-by-verse commentary.

**E. The Reformation Study Bible** - RC Sproul is the editor of this incredible Study Bible. Not as thorough as the others, but where it comments it does so clearly and effectively.

F. For even more resources for Unconditional Election, be sure to read through the bibliography in appendix A.



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