



## *Ordo Salutis* (Order of Salvation)

### Lesson 1: Foreknowledge–Predestination–Election

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#### Introduction to *Ordo Salutis*

The term *ordo salutis* is Latin for “order of salvation.” However, some have questioned whether it is right to put salvation into ordered steps. They will argue that the Bible does not contain a verse that gives an order to how someone receives salvation. While there is no verse in the Bible that spells out every single detailed step of salvation, there are verses that recognize an order. For example, Romans 8:29–30 says, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” These verses clearly detail that there is an order to salvation. Another example is found in Philippians 3:21 that speaks of Christ, “who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” We understand this to be the glorification of the body of the Christian that has not yet happened but will happen when Christ returns (v. 20). This is the final blessing in salvation for God’s people.

As we study the Bible, there is a clear order to the salvation of God’s people. In this series, we are going to study the eight steps in the *ordo salutis*:

1. Foreknowledge/predestination/election (God’s choice of some unto salvation)
2. Effectual call/regeneration (the new birth)
3. Conversion (repentance and faith)
4. Justification (declaration of right legal standing)
5. Adoption (placed into the family of God)
6. Sanctification (progressive growth in holiness)
7. Perseverance (remaining in Christ)
8. Glorification (receiving a resurrection body)

The first step happens before the application of redemption takes place. Steps two through five occur simultaneously when one becomes a Christian. Steps six and seven occur during the remainder of the earthly life of the Christian. The final step happens at the return of Christ and completes the application of redemption for the Christian.

## Key Verse: Ephesians 1:4

“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”

## Foreknowledge

The foreknowledge of God in the New Testament is the Greek verb *proginōskō*. It means “to know beforehand or in advance, or to choose beforehand.”<sup>1</sup> The Greek noun is *prognōsis*. It speaks not of simple foreknowledge but of the knowledge that characterizes an intimate personal relationship. In fact, God’s foreknowledge speaks of God’s relational knowledge of everyone who is in His redemptive plan before they exist in time and space. God’s foreknowledge is not passive and is not dependent upon foresight of what humans will do. Rather, God’s foreknowledge is eternally purposed by God Himself.<sup>2</sup>

1. Romans 8:29. What two actions did God do in this verse? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. 1 Peter 1:1–2. Who does Peter write to? \_\_\_\_\_
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## Predestination/Election

God says in Isaiah 46:9–10, “*I am* God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’” This verse identifies God’s general decree by which he has determined all things that come to pass. The term *predestination* is often employed as a synonym for God’s decree, since He predestines all things. However, it is also used in a narrower sense to refer to how God deals with sinful man concerning salvation. As it pertains to salvation, predestination concerns God’s decision to elect some to salvation (election) and His decision to pass over others and punish them for their sins (reprobation).<sup>3</sup>

We may define the doctrine of election as follows: the free and sovereign choice of God, made in eternity past, to set His love on certain individuals, and, on the basis of nothing in themselves but solely

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Accordance, 866.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017). 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 493.

because of the good pleasure of His will, to choose them to be saved from sin and damnation and to inherit the blessings of eternal life through the mediatorial work of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Several passages in the New Testament affirm quite clearly that God ordained beforehand those whom He would save.

1. Acts 13:48. According to this verse, who believed? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Romans 8:30. What four acts did God do? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Romans 9:11–13. Why did God choose Jacob? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Ephesians 1:5. What did God predestine believers to? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Ephesians 1:11. Who are those that have obtained an inheritance? \_\_\_\_\_
6. 1 Thessalonians 1:4–5. How does Paul know God chose them? \_\_\_\_\_
7. 1 Timothy 5:21. What does Paul say about angels? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Misunderstandings of the Doctrine of Election**

1. **Election does not mean we are robots.** Many people will conclude that the doctrine of election means we are robots or puppets without a will. However, election does not exclude the fact that man has a will to make choices. As Wayne Grudem says, “Our choices are *real choices* and do have significant effects, because God has made us in such a wonderful way that He has endowed us with the property of willing choice . . . One approach about God’s concurrence is to say that if our choices are real, they *cannot* be caused by God . . . It seems better to affirm that God causes all things to happen, but that He does so in such a way that He somehow upholds our ability to make *willing, responsible choices*, choices that have *real and eternal results*, and for which we are *held accountable*. Exactly how God combines His providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect or the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all of Scripture” (italics original).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 321-22.

**2. Election is not based on God's foreknowledge of our faith.** A common argument for predestination is that God will only choose those whom He knows will choose Him. This argument says that God looks down the corridor of time to see who will choose Him and based on that person's choice, God will then choose them. However, the Bible never tells us that God's choice of a person is based upon some fact about them, such as the fact that they would believe, but God's choice is always in relation to the fact that God *knows the person*. Galatians 4:9 says, "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God." When people know God in the Bible, or when God *knows* them, it is knowledge that characterizes an intimate personal relationship, not facts about a person. God did not choose Jacob because of something he would do (Rom. 9:11), rather it was simply in order that His purpose of election might continue. The Jewish remnant who have come to faith in Christ are a remnant "according to God's gracious choice" (Rom. 11:5) If God's choice was based upon something they would do, namely choose to believe in Him, then it would not be grace (Rom. 11:6). Nothing a person does influences God's election of them. God chose us simply because He decided to bestow His love upon us (Eph. 1:5).

### **Common Objections to the Doctrine of Election<sup>6</sup>**

Many people have objections to the doctrine of election. The following are some of their objections:

- 1. Election means we do not have a choice to accept or reject Christ.** According to this objection, the doctrine of election denies the gospel invitation that appeals to the will of man and commands people to make a choice to accept or reject Christ's invitation. In response, the doctrine of election does not deny that man has voluntary choice and that people make willing decision to accept or reject Christ. Man's choice is voluntary because his choices are what he wants to do and what he decides to do. This does not mean that our choices are absolutely free, because God can work sovereignly through our desires and guarantee that our choices come about as He has ordained. However, this is still a real choice on our part because God has created us with the property of making willing choices.
- 2. Election means unbelievers never had a chance to believe.** According to this objection, if God decreed from eternity that some people would not believe, then there was no chance for them to believe, and salvation is unfair. There are two responses: 1) We must understand that the Bible does not allow us to say that unbelievers had no chance to believe. When people reject Christ, the blame is always on them for their willful choice to reject Him, not on any decree of God. Jesus said in John 8:43–44, "Why do

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pgs. 680-84.

you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. You are of *your* father the devil, and **you want to do** the desires of your father” (bold added). In John 5:40 Jesus says, “you are **unwilling** to come to Me so that you may have life” (bold added). People who remain in unbelief do so because they want to and are unwilling to come to Christ. The blame for unbelief always lies with the unbelievers, never with God. 2) Paul answers this objection in Romans 9:20 when he says, “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?”

- 3. Election is unfair.** According to this objection, it is unfair for God to choose some to be saved and pass over others so as not to be saved. There are two responses: 1) It would be perfectly fair and just for God not to save anyone. What did God do with the angels when they sinned? He did not spare them but cast them into hell and committed them to darkness to be kept until judgment (2 Peter 2:4). It would be perfectly fair for God to do that with all men too, because we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23). The fact that God chooses to save some at all is a demonstration of His grace. When God is questioned about being unjust, Paul calls upon God’s rights as the omnipotent Creator to show mercy on whom He will in Romans 9:14–15. He continues in Romans 9:20–24 and shows that man has no right to question God or accuse Him of unfairness or injustice. 2) We must never put God on a human level. To imply that God is not fair is to say that He must do what I want Him to do. This is to put God down on a human level instead of understanding that as the sovereign God, He can sovereignly choose to save whoever He so chooses.

### **Application**

1. How does the doctrine of election bring comfort to you?
2. How does the doctrine of election cause you to praise God?
3. How does the doctrine of election encourage you to evangelize?