

Biblical Soteriology: An Overview and Defense of the Reformed Doctrines of Salvation

by Ra McLaughlin

Unconditional Election, Part 3

ANSWERING THE OBJECTIONS TO THE DOCTRINE OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

II. ARGUMENTS BASED ON THE DEFINITION OF “ELECTION”

- A. The biblical adjective “elect” does not mean “chosen,” but rather “choice” or “superior.” It is a statement of human quality, not of divine action.**

The Greek adjective usually translated “elect” in Scripture is *eklektos*. It appears 22 times in the New Testament, and in most of its uses one can make grammatical and syntactical sense of either “chosen” or “choice/superior.” In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), *eklektos* clearly means “choice/superior” in many instances. Why then can it not be argued that the elect are the “choice/superior ones”?

The response to this objection must include the fact that the New Testament does not identify the elect simply by the adjective *eklektos*, but also by the noun *ekloge* and the verb *eklego*.

The noun *ekloge* clearly refers to the act of choosing or electing in Romans 9:11; 11:5,28 and in 1 Thessalonians 1:4. Of these, in Romans 11:5 and 1 Thessalonians 1:4 *ekloge* specifically refers to the elect. In its three other occurrences in the New Testament (Acts 9:15; Rom. 11:7; 2 Pet. 1:10), its use is arguably ambiguous.

The verb *eklego* refers clearly to the act of “choosing” in 19 of its 20 uses (Mark 13:20; Luke 6:13; 10:42; 14:7; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2,24; 6:5; 13:17; 15:7,22,25; 1 Cor. 1:27,28; Eph. 1:4; Jas. 2:5). Only in Luke 9:35 might it be argued that *eklego* could possibly mean “choice/superior,” but even there this translation is unlikely. Rather, the phrase “my chosen one” is almost certainly a messianic title referring to the one God chose to fulfill his purposes. Compare:

“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased” (Matt. 12:18a); and

“And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God’” (Luke 23:35).

Eklego specifically identifies the elect in Mark 13:20 and Ephesians 1:4, and in both these instances it is clear that the “elect” are “those who have been chosen:”

“And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days” (Mark 13:20).

In this verse, “elect” is the adjective *eklektos* and “he chose” is the verb *eklego*. It is clear in this context that the repetition of the different forms of this word reinforces that both the adjective and the verb may refer to the act of choosing.

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph. 1:4).

Here also the verb *eklego* clearly refers to “choosing.”

The verb *eklego* overwhelmingly refers to choosing, not to superiority, and is sometimes specifically used of God’s electing people to salvation. The noun *ekloge* is also specifically used of God’s electing people to salvation. The adjective *eklektos* also refers of God’s electing people to salvation at least in Mark 13:20. Even if some ambiguous uses of these words refer to that which is “choice/superior,” there is no grounds to argue that the words never refer to God’s choosing whom he will save.

- B. Christ alone is elect, and people are elect only when they are in Christ. One is not elect until he savingly believes, but becomes elect when he is united to Christ by faith. God eternally declared that the elect would be saved, but did not necessarily identify or even know who the elect would be.**

This various forms of this argument incorporate one or more of the following errors: 1) “elect” never means “chosen by God”; 2) God chose the elect only after foreseeing their faith; 3) God did not elect specific individuals.

1. “Elect” never means “chosen by God.”

See the response to objection IIA immediately above.

2. God chose the elect only after foreseeing their faith.

See the previous *Responses to the Objections to the Doctrine of Unconditional Election: Arguments Based on Scripture, and/or the Definition(s) of “Foreknowledge” and/or “Predestination”* (section I of this outline).

3. God did not elect specific individuals.

This portion of the objection generally asserts that “elect” is the status one receives upon belief in Christ. Sometimes it is argued that Christ himself is “the elect,” and that believers receive a derivative status as “elect” when they are in him.

There is no doubt scripturally that the elect are chosen “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3-12; 2 Tim. 1:8-10). The points in contention here are: a) individuals other than Christ were specifically chosen/elected; and b) these individuals were chosen/elected prior to coming to faith in Christ.

a. Individuals other than Christ were specifically chosen/elected.

In Ephesians 1:4 Paul wrote that God chose “us in Him before the foundation of the world.” That is, God chose specific people who were not Christ (“us”).

Paul told Timothy that God had granted “us” “grace . . . in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9). While this verse does not use the word “elect,” the concept presented is that God had certain individuals in mind (“us”) to whom he granted grace in Christ prior to creating the world. Having these men in mind and granting them something indicates God’s prior selection/election of these men to receive this grace.

Further, Revelation 13:8 states: “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.” This passage indicates that specific people had their names written in the Lamb’s book of life prior to God’s creation of the world. In order for their names to be recorded, the identities of these specific individuals had to be known to God.

b. These individuals were chosen/elected prior to coming to faith in Christ.

In Ephesians 1:4 Paul wrote that God chose “us in Him before the foundation of the world.” That is, God chose these specific people who were not Christ (“us”) before the foundation of the world. “Before the foundation of the world” precedes the actual coming to faith of the elect. Thus, prior to their coming to faith, these individuals were “chosen/elect.”

He also told Timothy that God had granted “us” “grace . . . in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim. 1:9). God’s purpose and grace were not revealed until Christ’s first advent (2 Tim. 1:10), but they were determined prior to creation, before these men actually came to faith.

Revelation 13:8 states: “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.” Their identities were known to God, and their salvation certain, prior to God’s creation of the world, and thus prior to their coming to faith.

III. ARGUMENTS BASED ON LOGIC

- A. Unconditional election requires that God sovereignly predetermine both election and reprobation. If God sovereignly appoints man to reprobation and creates him anyway, then man cannot help but be reprobate and therefore is not responsible for being reprobate. Since man is not responsible for being reprobate, man cannot be blamed for being reprobate. If man cannot be blamed for being reprobate, he cannot be**

justly condemned. Since some men are reprobate and justly condemned, unconditional election is false.

This objection asserts that unconditional election eliminates the factor of man's free will from the salvation process. From this assertion, it assumes that man is thereby relieved of responsibility for his sin. Here are some problems with this line of thinking:

1. Reprobation is not the cause of sin or condemnation.
 - a. Man is not to blame for the fact that God predestined him to reprobation. This does not mean, however, that man is not rightly blamed and condemned for being sinful. Man is not sinful and worthy of condemnation because he is reprobate. Rather, man is sinful and worthy of condemnation because he bears Adam's imputed guilt, because he has a corrupt nature, and because he commits actual sin. Reprobation is God's eternal decree to withhold mercy, and to justly condemn. It is not the cause of sin or guilt, but rather God's decision to respond to sin and guilt in a particular way.
 - b. To put it in somewhat different terms, it is true that God has created some people as vessels of mercy, and others as vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (Romans 9:21-23). To make a person a vessel of wrath, though, does not mean to make him sinful. God made the reprobate as vessels of wrath, and he fully intends to pour wrath into them. God never says that he plans to pour sin into them. They fill themselves with sin, and God only properly administers justice. The proper justice, of course, is wrath.
 - c. While it is true that God has made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil, it is equally true that God has not caused the condemnation of sinners. Condemnation is God's response to sin, and sin is that which is against God's character. If God directly causes something, by definition it must be within his character and therefore not sinful. Therefore, if man is sinful and thus condemned, it must be the result of man's action and not God's action.

2. Responsibility does not depend upon ability.

- a. For example, in the atonement, God held Christ responsible for sin even though Christ himself was incapable of sin and did not sin.

The rebuttal might be made that Christ's situation is different because Christ freely accepted responsibility for sin. In fact, this is not different from fallen man's condition. Fallen man freely and willfully sins, and thereby incurs guilt for himself. He also freely and willfully concurs with Adam's rebellion, and rejoices in his own corrupt nature.

- b. As another example, when Achan took plunder that was under God's ban, God held the entire nation responsible for Achan's sin — a sin which they had no ability either to prevent or, being ignorant of it, to rectify (Josh. 7:11-13). Further, not only Achan, but also his sons and daughters were put to death for the transgression, along with Achan's donkeys, sheep and oxen (Josh. 7:24-26).

3. The objection implies that God unjustly creates men whom he knows will be sinful if he does not also allow them the genuine possibility of repentance.

- a. God is not obligated to be merciful — he is free to show mercy to whom he desires, and free to withhold it from whom he desires (Rom. 9:10-18). God's will to be merciful, not man's appeal for mercy, ultimately determines whether or not God will be merciful. It is God's right to create men to whom he has no obligation to be merciful.

- b. If creating reprobate men who have no ability to repent or to be righteous is unjust because it inevitably leads to their condemnation, then certainly intending to create men for the specific purpose of condemning them is an unjust intention. This objection cannot overcome the fact that Scripture says God actually does create men for the specific purpose of condemning them (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:19-24). Neither can it account for the fact that God allows the devil to prevent people from repenting, compelling them to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26).

- c. There is no injustice in God's creation of a being whom he knows will go to destruction. If God is omniscient and knows who will be saved and who will be reprobate, and some people are reprobate, then it must be within God's character to create a being whom he knows will be reprobate. Since God knows and does this, and there is no injustice with God (Romans 9:14), it must not be unjust.
 - d. Whatever God commands or decrees is righteous. The fact that man cannot repent without first being regenerated by God does not mean that man is thereby treated unjustly when he is punished for his sin. Man is condemned for being sinful, not for being unable to change his circumstances, and not exclusively for failing to repent.
4. Unconditional election does not remove man's free will from the salvation process. Rather, it states that all fallen men, by their own free will, reject God and thereby condemn themselves to his judgment. In the case of those who are elect, God renews their free will (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 2:13; Col. 3:10) and grants them repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25) so that they respond positively to the gospel. In the case of the reprobate, God does not renew their free will, but allows it to follow its fallen, sinful course. Both the elect and the reprobate act according to their free will.

B. God desires every person ever to be saved, but not every person ever is saved. This implies that God has chosen not to impose salvation on anyone — that election is not God's sovereign determination of who will be saved. Rather, election is an eternal recognition that God has foreseen faith in certain individuals. Election is conditioned upon belief.

This objection assumes that if God could save everyone, he would. His inability to save everyone is not attributable to any lack of power on God's part (God is admitted to be omnipotent), but rather to his lack of authority. God is said either intrinsically to lack the authority to impose salvation on men, or to have ceded this authority to men. As a consequence, God cannot elect without man's permission. Therefore, God must submit his decree to elect to the faith or lack thereof that he foresees in men.

This objection contains three major categories of flaws: 1) God lacks authority; 2) God would save everyone; and 3) faith determines/precedes election.

1. God lacks authority.

Scripturally, since men are God's creation, God intrinsically has all authority over them, including authority to be merciful to some according to his pleasure, and to be unmerciful to others according to his pleasure:

“So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ 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? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?” (Rom. 9:18-21).

The answer Paul assumed his readers would understand to his rhetorical question was, “Yes, God has that right — he has that authority.” Paul based God's authority to do this in God's role as creator, and he argued that God's authority continued, that it was not ceded to man.

Moreover, if God were to cede any of his authority to anyone — rather than to delegate it — the Bible would certainly make explicit note of it because it would be such an unimaginable and unprecedented event. Even when God granted all authority to Christ (Matt. 28:18), that authority was delegated, not ceded. That is, the Father did not relinquish that authority, but he allowed Christ to exercise the Father's own authority. This fact that the Father always retains all authority was such a basic concept to the biblical writers that they did not feel the need to explain this in normal circumstances. In 1 Corinthians, however, Paul recognized his audiences theological shortcomings and wrote explicitly,

“But when He says, ‘All things are put in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him” (1 Cor. 15:27).

Paul was saying, “Obviously, Christ still remains under the authority of the Father, who is the one who delegated all authority to Christ in the first place.” If the plan of salvation were to violate this principle somewhere along the line by the Father forfeiting his authority in any area to his creatures, certainly the writers of Scripture would have recorded this astounding detail. Nowhere does Scripture record such a thing.

If God has the power and authority to save all men, and he does not save all men, then at least on some level God does not desire the salvation of all men. If he wanted to save everyone, he would.

2. **God would save everyone.**

What then does one do with the many verses in the Bible that appear to teach that God wants to save everyone?

- a. “‘Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord God, ‘rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?’ . . . ‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Therefore, repent and live!’” (Ezek. 18:23,32).
- b. “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezek. 33:11).

In these verses, death is the end of the wicked/sinful, and life is the reward of the righteous/repentant. God states that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. This is obviously true; neither sin nor its consequences please God. This does not mean that God is not satisfied in judging the wicked, or that he does not desire the death of the wicked, or that he is not glorified by the just punishment of the wicked. In fact, God is the one who demands the death of the wicked in these passages, so in at least some sense, God desires the death of the wicked even in these passages. The context of these statements so closely ties sin with its consequences that they should be understood to be saying, “I have no pleasure in your sin, nor in its consequence

death, but I am pleased by repentance. Therefore, repent, cease to sin, and live, and thereby please me.”

It is also worth noting that Ezekiel 18:23 and 18:32 are not talking about spiritual life and death, but physical life and death according to civil law. The one who dies is a criminal who is put to death for his crimes (18:13).

A similar scenario is true in Ezekiel 33, wherein God’s arguments and words are very close to those in Ezekiel 18. Literally, God spoke of wicked men who were put to death in Israel for violating the Mosaic Law, and figuratively he applied this lesson to the nation of Israel (Ezek. 33:12-20). Israel was to repent of its sin or God would allow Jerusalem to be captured (Ezek. 33:1-20). Because they did not repent, Jerusalem fell (Ezek. 33:21-33).

- c. “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost . . . Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David” (Isa. 55:1-3).
- d. “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31).

These passages are used to show the universal calling of God and therefore to infer that God desires that every person ever be saved. The argument is that the call of the gospel would not be universal unless God wished all to be saved. This is not a necessary conclusion from the universal quality of the call. Notice, also, that neither passage is in the form of an offer, both are commands. God has always commanded righteousness, and the content of a gospel message is righteousness. God commands such of every last person on the face of the planet.

This does not mean that his eternal plan and desire is to save them all, it only means that God commands repentance, and that those who repent are saved. These texts say nothing about who can or will come, they only teach what happens to those who do come. Neither text refutes the concept that those who repent have been unconditionally predestined to do so.

The calling of Isaiah specifically refutes that a gospel proclamation necessarily evidences God's desire that those who hear the message repent.

“Then [Isaiah] heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am. Send me!’ And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: “Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.” Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent and be healed’” (Isa. 6:8-10).

In this passage, God commanded Isaiah to prophesy specifically in order that the people would be hardened and condemned, not saved. John later related the following about Jesus' ministry, recalling this specific idea and passage:

“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them’” (John 12:37-40).

According to John, God himself caused the blindness and hardness of heart that ensured the impossibility that these people might repent. Certainly, God did not desire the repentance of those whom he prevented from repenting, at least not in any

sense that would bolster the argument that God would save everyone.

Additionally, the Holy Spirit actually forbid Paul and his associates from preaching the gospel in Asia:

“And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them” (Acts 16:6-7).

The general nature of the proclamation of the gospel does not indicate that God desires the salvation of every person ever such that God would save them if he were able. While God may well on some level desire the salvation of all men, he does not desire their salvation such that he would save them if he could.

- e. “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

This verse was directed not toward the world, but toward the church (called “beloved” in the immediately preceding verse). It was part of the letter’s broader call to Christians to resist false teachers diligently and to be steadfast in their faith. Anyone who did not persevere in faith would ultimately perish. As Peter taught, God does not desire that the church should be full of unbelievers who ultimately perish, but rather that those people in the church would repent of their sin and be saved. God even delayed bringing the day of judgment at least in part so that the church would have time to repent.

This does not mean that God would never bring judgment against the church, or that he would never desire to do so. If the church rebelled sufficiently, God may well have changed his mind about it, so that his desire to punish it outweighed his desire to be patient with it. Many times in the Old Testament Israel failed to repent, and God’s attitude toward them eventually changed from wanting to preserve them to wanting to punish them (compare, for example, God’s statements about

his desires and decisions in Lev. 26 and Jer. 18). It is the same with the church.

- f. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

In this passage, the point of contention is that Paul tells Timothy that God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The conditional election position objects that, if it is true that God desires each and every last human being to be saved, then God must not actively and irrevocably appoint people to salvation and to reprobation. If God did actively appoint everyone’s destiny, and God desired the salvation of everyone when he appointed destinies, then God would have appointed everyone to salvation and thus everyone would be saved. It would be contradictory for God to desire that the reprobate be saved while at the same time sovereignly decreeing their condemnation. In short, an eternal decree for the reprobation of someone God desires to be saved presents a contradiction in God’s character.

The reasoning of the conditional argument concludes that the following cannot both be true: a) God desires every person to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth; and b) God decrees men to condemnation. From the immediate text, the conclusion is drawn that statement “a” is true and therefore statement “b” is false. Here are several problems with this thinking:

- i. The statement that God desires “all men” to be saved need not mean “each and every person ever.” It is equally likely, and equally valid to suggest, that it means “all mankind,” or “all kinds of people.” In this case, it is certainly true according to Scripture, even as interpreted by those who believe in unconditional election, that God desires to save all mankind, though through a remnant,

and all kinds of people, again through a remnant. Consider for example Acts 21:28:

“Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man [Paul] who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law, and this place.”

Obviously, Paul never preached to each and every person everywhere (or “ever”!), particularly since he was prevented from preaching in certain areas of Asia by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-7). The phrase “all men” meant something different to the first century Greek audience than it means to most modern Christian audiences. They did not understand the term to refer to every person everywhere/ever. Compare:

“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets” (Luke 6:26).

It would never be the case that “all men” would know these people, let alone speak well of them.

“If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (John 11:48).

“All men” could not have included those men who would have their place and nation taken away — if they had believed they would have happily given these to Christ.

“Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men” (Acts 20:26).

This statement was made by Paul, who had murdered Christians (Acts 7:58; 8:1,3; 9:1,21; 22:4; 26:10-11).

“For you [Paul] will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:15).

See comments on Acts 21:28 above.

“I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

This is a hyperbolic statement, no doubt, but in its context Paul was not referring to individuals, but to all types of men, most particularly Jew and Gentile.

- ii. Statement “b” God decrees men to condemnation, is shown to be true by Romans 9:17-23. Therefore statement “a” must be wrong.
- iii. Statement “a” that God desires every person to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth is directly refuted by Scriptures such as:

“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them’” (John 12:37-40).

God did not desire that they be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth if he prevented them from understanding the truth that could have led them to salvation.

- iv. 1 Timothy 4:10, a passage within the same book and context as the text in question, reads:

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.”

If God not only desires the salvation of every person, but is indeed the savior of every person, then all men are indeed saved. This, however, is not true. Therefore, either “all men” doesn’t include those who eventually perish, or Paul isn’t talking about salvation unto eternal life. Either way, 1 Timothy 2:4-5 and 4:10 in conjunction do not support statement “a” that God desires every person to gain eternal life.

C. Salvation is conditional, and election to salvation must respect this condition.

This is a true statement, but not as the objection intends it to be. This objection assumes that salvation is conditional upon a condition which must be met by man apart from God’s work and influence. Such conditions do not exist. The only conditions to salvation are those that rely entirely on God (i.e., Christ’s atonement, God’s good pleasure), and those that God sovereignly fulfills in man on man’s behalf (i.e., faith [Eph. 2:8-9], repentance [Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25], perseverance [Phil. 1:6]).

D. God is not arbitrary. Unconditional election requires that God prefer some individuals over others for arbitrary reasons.

Unconditional election requires that God elect some and reprobate others according to his own good pleasure, and God’s good pleasure is not arbitrary. God exercises no irrationality or capriciousness in election and reprobation. The fact that he does not reveal his hidden counsel to man, or always explain his good pleasure does not open that good pleasure to the charge of arbitrariness.

Further, election is always in light of Christ’s atonement and reprobation is always in light of sin. The decisions may be mysterious, but they are not unfounded or arbitrary.

E. God is not a respecter of persons, and he is fair. Therefore, he must treat everyone equally. Unconditional election requires that God treat people unequally.

God is not a “respector of persons” (Acts 10:34 KJV), but the specific meaning of this phrase is that God does not exclude Gentiles from salvation while accepting Jews. More to the point, there is no logical connection between the premises and conclusion of this argument. Scripture supports the facts that God is not a respector of persons as defined above, that he is fair insofar as he treats no one unjustly, and also that he does not treat everyone equally. To put the matter bluntly, the conclusion that God must treat people equally would be false no matter what premises one collected to prove the contrary:

“And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! 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 does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’” (Rom. 9:10-19).

God clearly treated Jacob and Esau unequally, deciding to do so for reasons not attributable to the twins. Since this passage speaks directly of election (see 9:20 ff.), it demonstrates that God specifically treats people unequally in the decrees of election and reprobation. He does not treat them with unequal justice — everything he does is absolutely just and righteous — but he treats them with unequal mercy and favor. Some receive mercy, some do not. God has mercy on whom he has mercy, and offers no other explanation. In fact, Paul anticipated that God’s actions would bring the charge of unfairness: “Why does he still find fault.” Paul’s answer? “Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?” (Rom. 9:20). God has a right to dispense unequal mercy, just as the potter has the right over the clay (Rom 9:21).