

EPHESIANS 1:4—GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN IN FORMING THE CHURCH

This is the section that begins to explain how all the spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ become ours. The previous verse was fantastic but we are here on earth and we battle with sin.. How are we connected with treasures of grace? Paul shows what has been done by God in order that we be connected with our treasures: according as! This starts at verse 4 and goes to v 14.

Our position does not depend upon anything we do, primarily; not primarily even upon the action of the Son. The primary action is of the Father who chose unto Himself a people out of the whole of mankind before the foundation of the world, and then presented, gave these people whom He had chosen to the Son, in order that the Son would redeem them and do everything that was necessary for their reconciliation with Himself. He came into the world, and accomplished His work, for these people who had been given to Him by the Father.

1. THE METHOD—ELECTION

A. WHAT IS IT THAT FIRST LEADS ANYONE TO BEING A CHRISTIAN?

1. It is not because people accept God or make a decision

Paul does not say it started with us and our faith in Christ. We do have a time where we place our trust in Christ, but it doesn't start there.

There are times when people stand here before us, and they give their testimony before they are baptized and join the church and come to the Lord's Table. Their testimonies are usually fascinating sermons in themselves, but my point is that everyone thinking of confessing Christ and being baptized should read this testimony of Paul. Notice what he doesn't say, "When I decided to give God a chance . . ." No. Or, "When I opened my heart and let Jesus come in . . ." No. That is the way many people speak today. They don't go back before the creation of the world, but they start with themselves and what they did. But Paul says that God, working according to an eternal plan, set him apart from his birth, before he took his first breath and uttered his first cry, then God had a plan for him. That's how Paul saw his conversion, not "I had the courage to make the all-important decision to accept Christ." Where does anyone anywhere in the Bible talk like that? You will search in vain looking for it. Those men were full of the Spirit, and so they knew that before the foundation of the world God had loved them and purposed that they were going to be his people.

One will protest and say, "But I was the one who believed in Jesus Christ. I repented of my sin. I confessed him as my Saviour." Of course you did, but it was God's grace that enabled you to do so wasn't it? Predestination does not take away our liberty. Please understand that. God hasn't merely foreordained what we shall choose. He has foreordained that we shall choose freely. We will know, afterwards, that we could have chosen differently.

2. It is not even the work of Christ on the cross

You would think this would be the place we would start with salvation, at the cross. It does not start in time and space, however.

3. It is according to this text: *We are chosen by God.*

Paul goes all the way back to eternity and it was done by God the Father. The Bible always starts with God. It never starts with man. The ones who enjoy spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ do so because they have been chosen by God to do so. All blessings come from the fount.

B. THE ONLY TWO POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

1. To believe we are chosen by God simply for His own good pleasure

It is in spite of ourselves, as we were enemies, aliens, and haters of God.

o I come back to Ephesians 1:4, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world." And I close with my own personal confession of faith in this great biblical truth of election.

Before the creation of the universe God thought of me. He fixed his gaze on me and chose me for himself. He did not choose me because I was already in Christ of my own doing, but that I might be in Christ. He did not choose me because he saw me as a believer, but so that I might become a believer. He did not choose me because I chose him, but so that I might choose him. He did not choose me because I was holy or good but so that I might become holy and good.

Everything I am and all I hope to be is rooted in God's freely choosing me. My faith, my hope, my work are not the ground of electing grace but only its effect. And so there is no ground for boasting except in God. And in the face of fear and loss of assurance and all my own defect, I speak this word of trust: "Who shall bring any charge against the Lord's elect!" (Romans 8:33).

First notice what the point of God's choosing is in 1 Corinthians 1:27–30.

27 God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

What this text says very clearly is that God chose particular kinds of people to be in the church. He did not just choose the church and leave its composition to man. He chose foolish individuals and called them into Christ. He chose some weak individuals and called them into Christ. He chose some low and despised individuals and called them into Christ. So that no one might boast in anyone but the Lord.

And then to make this crystal clear he said in verse 30 (literally): "From him [God] you are in Christ Jesus." Or as the NASB says, "By his doing you are in Christ Jesus." Or the NIV: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus." In other words, it is just as though Paul knew that someone would come along some day and say that God does not choose who is in Christ, but only chooses Christ and any who put themselves in Christ. So he says, in verses 27–29, that God chose the individuals who would make up the church in Christ. And he says in verse 30 that it is by God's doing that they are put in Christ.

The glorious, unshakable, objective foundation of your being a Christian is that God chose you to be one. God put you in Christ. So I say with Paul (in verse 26) "Consider your calling!" Consider how you came to be in Christ! Think about it. It will take all boasting off of man and put it all on God. So verse 31 ends the section: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." This is the boast of assurance. This is the exultation of considering our calling and our election, and seeing that it's all of God, and feeling a tremendous peace and confidence and courage and strength and love well up inside to keep us going in the face any opposition. Because "who can bring any charge against God's elect!" (Romans 8:33).

2. Or believe that we were chosen by God because He saw that we would believe.

Many Deny That God Elects Individuals

Most say we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world because God

with His perfect foreknowledge saw that we would exercise our faith. God chose those who have already chosen to be Christians, those who decided to believe on Jesus as the Lord and savior. They sought out salvation. There really is no third possibility.

But we must face the Scriptures.

There are many, many people who do not believe this. They do not believe that God chose who will be saved and who will be passed over and left to unbelief and rebellion. They insist that this text only teaches that God chose Christ and an undefined number of those who choose to be in Christ by faith. They say that Ephesians 1:4 is not an election or choosing of individuals, but an election of Christ and the church; but what individuals are part of the church, God does not decide. It's like the Super Bowl. The national officials don't choose a specific team of men to go to the Super Bowl; they choose that the winners of the playoffs go, whoever they are. God does not choose who will be in Christ and who will be saved. That lies ultimately in the power of man's autonomous will, which God does not rule.

"Chose Us in Him"

They say that the wording of verse 4 proves this interpretation: "God chose us in him." But this wording will not settle the issue. If anything the wording points the other way: it says he chose us. Not an undefined mass of people, but us, you and me personally. He chose us. The word means select from a larger group. And the way he did it was in relation to Christ. Christ was not an afterthought to election. God chose us to come to salvation in Christ, not apart from Christ. But it was us that he chose. These words are not strained at all in carrying this meaning that God chose particular people to be his children through their union with Christ.

election' or 'choose' arise. People seem to think that these 'hot' words mean some terrible contraction of the number that are going to be saved, as if election meant that at last God would have only a handful of people in heaven. Now there is no reason to believe from Scripture that only a tiny group of folk are going to be saved. The great promise of the Covenant of Grace with Abraham is that his seed is going to be numerous, like the sands on the seashore and the stars in heaven. The vision in Revelation 7 is of a multitude that no man can number around the throne of God and the Lamb. No way is the Devil going to carry the bulk of the human race down with him to hell. So we are to understand from the Bible that God has been utterly prodigal in the number of people he has chosen, his vast arms extended wide, wide, wide, as far as the east is from the west, as he takes to his bosom uncountable masses of people, far beyond human calculation. Our vision should be that where sin abounds grace did much more

abound. However, whatever their number, let's make sure we are counted amongst them. Nice, lovable people aren't going to hell simply because they have the misfortune not to belong to the elect. Men are condemned to dishonour and wrath only for their sins.

The second thing is this: people protest in an outraged tone, "suppose a father condemned some of his children to misery before they were born while he gave his other children supreme happiness, all out of his own arbitrary will, would that be right and just? Wouldn't it be brutal and detestable?" Of course it would; it would be execrable to the highest degree, so that we may never charge the God of love with behaviour like that. What we are dealing with is as far from that as light is from darkness. Fallen men and women are not in the position of being innocent children, and God is not a tyrannical monster. How does the righteous God, before whom the angels hide their eyes crying "Holy, Holy, Holy", see the world? "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:16). Those of the world are not of the Father, they are not his offspring, John says. When God looks into the thoughts of man what does the Lord see? "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). When God describes the state of man how does he sum him up? As dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). His heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Man is sick and covered in bruises and putrefying sores from head to toe in the sight of God. That is the situation, not children of a father, but rebels and criminals who have defied God with a high hand because they hate him. We will not have this Lord ruling over us. Thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against them all.

Even non-Christians do not consider a limited display of mercy to be unjust. Let me use this illustration: think of a high security prison. Islamic terrorists who have blown to bits boys and girls are kept there. IRA killers, the murderers of innocent men and women shopping on a Saturday afternoon, are there behind its bars. Drug barons and rapists who in their different heinous ways have destroyed the lives of many are kept incarcerated there. Con men are there, those who have plundered the pensions of thousands so that retired people have discovered themselves to be virtually penniless. Paedophiles are there. Thieves who have half killed old ladies and taken all their best possessions are there. Drunken joy riders who have mowed down school children and shown no remorse are there. 200 desperate criminals are there, and these prisoners are told one day that the parole board are meeting. Every prisoner applies for parole. The parole board examine all the cases and they decide to give parole to 10 men. Is that unfair? Shouldn't they have released all 200? Is there anything cruel or unrighteous in leaving 190 criminals behind bars to serve out their sentences? Have their sentences and punishments honoured the justice of the courts? Yes. Were the judgments that were passed upon them fair? Yes. Did their punishments fit their crimes? Yes. They were enemies of the citizens of the state as lawbreakers without a conscience, and they were justly found guilty. You can see immediately my application. The Bible tells us that all the world lies guilty before God

C. DEFINITION OF CHOSEN

(EKLEGO)-To pick out, choose,-- middle voice—the subject of the verb acts in His own interest—to set apart something for one's self, to choose someone for a definite object or calling

This is in aorist tense and middle voice indicating God's totally independent choice. It is reflexive as a verb and it indicates that God not only chose by Himself but for Himself.. The purpose was for His glory. Glory of God even takes precedence over Even our own good.

Thus, this selection of the saints in this age of grace is the act of God choosing out from among mankind, certain for Himself. These become His own, to be used for a certain purpose.

D. THREE KINDS OF ELECTION

1. Theocratic
Deut 7:6-8

2. Vocational
Acts 9:15

3. Salvation

Rom 8:29, 9:11,19, Acts 13:48, 1 Thess 1:3-4, 1 Pet 1:2, John 6:37, 44

2 Thess 2:13-14, Eph 2:1-2, 1 Cor 2:12, 2 Cor 4:3-6, 2 Tim 1:9

2 Thess 2:13-14—You are not separated because you believe it, but in order that you may believe it.

2 Cor 4:—This is the answer to how faith originates. The god of this world blinds and makes men incapable of believing; the only true and living god shines into our hearts, and we believe.

This is the doctrine of regeneration which enables us to receive this new faculty, the ability to receive the truth.

E. BRIGHT STARS OF THE CHURCH WHO BELIEVED THIS DOCTRINE

With liberalism that came into the church, the doctrine of election in eternity almost completely disappeared.

Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, Martin Bucer, Divines of the Westminster Confession, John Bunyan, John Owen, Puritans, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Charles Spurgeon

This doctrine is of great importance. It refers to the sovereignty of God and the majesty of God.

If the plan of salvation plan was left up to man, it would fail, but if it is from God it is certain..

We can get no better security than that.

Although my understanding of this doctrine does not determine my salvation, it does determine my joy of salvation and security and certainty.

2. THE TIME—ETERNITY PAST

CHOSEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

1 Peter 1:20, Matthew 25:34, 2 Tim 1:9, Rev 13:8,17:8

(KATABOLE) Foundation—throwing down—the act of God throwing down a

Universe into space, speaking a material universe into existence

(KOSMOS) World, arrangement, order----We were chosen in eternity before the universe was created

) First, election is pretemporal: it was "before the foundation of the world" that God the Father chose us in Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 2 Thess. 2:13; see also 1 Thess. 1:4). This is to emphasize that the divine decision concerning human destiny is wholly unaffected by human deeds. To say that God chose us before the existence of all created things is to say that he chose us without regard to any created thing. It was before, and therefore independent of, the birth and behavior of the twins that God chose Jacob but not Esau. Election is not something that awaits some event in human history, either the cross-work of Jesus or the faith of man. It antedates all human history. God's choice is not dependent on human merit or temporal circumstances. God sovereignly elects us unto eternal life before we exist and without our consent. That isn't to say that our voluntary consent isn't important. We must still believe in Jesus, but our belief is itself the historical and experiential fruit or effect of God's pre-temporal elective decree (see Eph. 2:8).

What we see unfolding in time-space history is the progressive fulfillment of a divine purpose that was conceived in eternity past. Jesus himself declared that his redemptive sufferings at Calvary were specifically designed to accomplish the salvation of those God had already given (elected) him. And the faith of individual men and women is not the beginning, cause, or foundation of their election, but its fruit (see Eph. 2:8; Acts 13:48). The religious implications of this are profound, for either a person thanks himself for his faith, because it resulted in his election, or he thanks God for his election, because it resulted in his faith.

As a Calvinist, when I reflect upon my election in this light there wells up within my heart a virtual flood of wonder and worship. To think that my election proceeds from a grace that was 'born long before I was is glorious indeed. Charles Spurgeon perhaps put it best:

"In the very beginning, when this great universe lay in the mind of God, like unborn forests in the acorn cup; long ere the echoes awoke the solitudes; before the mountains were brought forth; and long ere the light flashed through the sky, God loved His chosen creatures. Before there was any created being --- when the ether was not fanned by an angel's wing, when space itself had not an existence, where there was nothing save God alone --- even then, in that loneliness of Deity, and in that deep quiet and profundity, His bowels moved with love for His chosen. Their names were written on His heart, and then were they dear to His soul. Jesus loved His people before the foundation of the world --- even from eternity! and when He called me by His grace, He said to me, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee'" (Autobiography, I:167).

3. THE PURPOSE—HOLY AND BLAMELESS

A. HOLY

A state of inward purity-----positive

Light

B. BLAMELESS

Outward or external condition of purity-----negative

Sin is absent

No Darkness

Eph 5:27

Col 2:10—All that God is, we become in Christ Jesus. We have Christ's perfect righteousness. Our practice does fall short but our position can never fall short, because it is exactly the same position that Christ has. But we should desire to live holy and blameless lives..

In either view, the fact remains that if our personal holiness and blamelessness are the goal or end for which we were chosen, they cannot be the ground or cause of our election. It cannot be the case that God foreknew any degree of holiness or blamelessness in us and on that basis chose us in his Son. It would be absurd for Paul to say, "God chose you to become holy and blameless because you already are holy and blameless." If this verse does not preclude the Arminian view of election, it surely wreaks havoc with all forms of Pelagianism!

Harry Kilbride wrote this: "God's choice is not a cold, arbitrary decision. Rather it is as if a great king ruled his kingdom with perfect justice. All those who were in prison were being justly punished for crimes willfully committed. Some faced the death penalty. However this loving king determined to display his grace in pardoning the guilty. So he made his way to death row and he offered a full and free pardon to any man who would confess his crimes and repent of them. Alas and sadly none would. So hard of heart

were they that they all despised their goodhearted monarch and his laws and spat in his face. Incredibly he wouldn't be defeated. He singled out the very worst offender and visited him again and again. He poured upon him words and gifts of love, pleading with him to accept the gracious offer of forgiveness. Eventually the hard heart was melted by such sincere love and personal sacrifice. Weeping with sorrow the criminal fell at the feet of his king, confessed his crimes and declared how utterly undeserving he was of such grace. He begged the king to allow him to live a new life of devoted royal service. In joy the king signed the papers of pardon and brought him home to the palace actually adopting him into the royal family. From then on, this erstwhile murderer from the gutter would be a prince.

"My friend: God's love for us was much greater than that of this king. What if this king could only pardon this villain if the king's own beloved son, his prince and heir, would die in his place? Why, no-one would believe such a story. They would say it was too farfetched. Yet that is the Gospel story. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son For God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God's love for you and for me cost him the Cross. If guilty sinners are punished shall God be charged with injustice? If the justly condemned despise his love and his offer of forgiveness shall God be blamed? But if God, determined in love, to yet redeem a people and if in love he includes you in that number, is your heart not overwhelmed with the amazing love and grace of God?