

Eternal Election

<i>Text</i>	Ephesians 1:4
<i>Readings</i>	Romans 9:1-8; Ephesians 1:1-14
<i>Theme</i>	God chose His people in Christ to be holy
<i>Purpose</i>	To explain God's mercy in electing us in Christ so we may praise Him
<i>Confession</i>	Belgic Confession Article 16

In this sermon we are dealing with the subject of God's election, which is often regarded as the most difficult doctrine of the Bible. It is clearly taught in the Scriptures – here and in many other passages – but it is not widely accepted in the church today, not by individual Christians or by churches.

By election we mean that God chose to rescue a certain number of people from the punishment of sin and he elected them in Christ for salvation.

Verse 4 says; "He chose us..." That's what election means; it means a choice, a selection, a distinction between certain individuals.

In verse 5 Paul used the word "predestined", which means to destine beforehand.

In verse 11 he used a different Greek word again which means to be chosen as heirs.

God chose or predestined certain people for salvation.

This is a hard teaching to understand and to accept. Even after we have said everything the Bible says there are still many questions left over.

In the end this is a teaching that we can only accept through faith. Unbelievers will rebel against it and will not accept it, but Christians accept it and believe it because it is taught in the Bible.

What the Scriptures say about election is closely connected with the character of God. The Scriptures and the Belgic Confession direct us to the mercy and the justice of God. In his mercy God saves some out of their sin; in his justice he condemns others for their sin.

In Ephesians 1 Paul deals with election in the **context of praise** to God for the gift of salvation.

In verse 3 he gave God the glory for having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Then in verse 4 he explained how we came to be included in all these blessings – it was because God chose us in Christ.

We'll consider what this verse says about election by looking at:

1. Its author, who is God
2. Its basis, which is in Christ
3. Its timing, which is before creation
4. Its purpose, which is to be holy and blameless.

1. Its author. Election is the particular work of God the Father - he chose us. Of course, this is something he decided in consultation with the Son and the Holy Spirit, but this is especially his work.

God has chosen us to salvation out of our situation of sin. All of humanity is condemned because of our association with Adam and his sin. Every person is born with a sinful human nature inherited from Adam, and every person commits sins each day.

Out of all those who are guilty and condemned God has chosen to save some. This will be a great number of people – a multitude that no one can count! These are his people, the elect, the saints, believers, the true church.

He chose to leave others in their sin and position of condemnation. This is known as the decree of reprobation. It means that God passed them by; in his justice he left them in their state of sin; he did not elect them to salvation.

You might ask; “Why did God choose some to be saved and leave others to be condemned? Why save some and not others?”

We don't know the answer to that question, except to say that this was his will, his choice, his decision.

A better question to ask would be this; “Why did God choose to save any at all?!” This is what is surprising, unexpected, remarkable – not that God has condemned sinners to punishment but that God chose some to be saved! This shows the amazing grace and the great love of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in that he chose us!

2. The BASIS of our election is “**in him**”, that is, in Christ.

The Scriptures teach us that all of humanity is represented by one man, Adam. All of us are condemned because of his sin. But God decided to save some of these people. He sent another man to succeed where Adam had failed, to be obedient where he had been disobedient. God sent his One and Only Son as the second Adam. Jesus is the new representative head of humanity and God has chosen his elect people to be saved in Christ. “He chose us in him.”

Why did he choose us in Christ?

It was not because of anything in us.

You and I were not chosen because of our merit. We were not chosen because we were any better than anyone else. We were not chosen because God saw some good in us.

We too were lost. We too were dead in our trespasses and sins. We too shared in Adam's condemnation. We too were unworthy of God's mercy. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us (Rom5:8). God did not choose us because we were good.

And God did not choose us because of foreseen faith.

This is how many Christians explain election. They say; "God looked into the future and saw that John Brown would believe and so God chose him on the basis of his foreseen faith."

But that is not how the Bible explains it. The answer to the question, "Why did God choose us?" is expressed in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." The basis of your election is that God chose you in Christ, not that you chose him.

This means that no one can boast about his salvation. All the glory must go to God. Salvation is God's work. The basis of our redemption is the work of the Lord Jesus, not our work; his obedience, not ours; his righteousness, not yours or mine.

God the Father chose us as his people in him that is, in Christ, on the basis of his work.

3. Its timing: When did God choose us? "...before the creation of the world."

Some people have the idea that the fall into sin caught God by surprise and that suddenly he had to think of another plan to set things right. That is not so. The plan of salvation was not *Plan B*; it was always *Plan A*. God knew that Adam would fall into sin. He did not cause Adam to fall, he was not the author of Adam's sin, but he knew it would happen and it was part of his plan and purpose.

Even before the creation of the world God the Father had planned to save the people he had chosen. God had all this planned even before he created Adam and Eve. He knew whom he would save even before we were born.

This only highlights that our salvation is the work of God and is not based on what we have done or will do. Paul made that point strongly in Romans 9 when he pointed to the two children of Issac and Rebekah; "Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad... she was told; the older will serve the younger. Just as it is written; Jacob I loved but Esau I hated." Paul cited this example to show that "God's purpose in election might stand." (Verses 11-13).

Even God's timing shows that salvation is his sovereign work.

God chose his people to be saved.
He chose us in Christ, his Son.
He chose us before the creation of the world.
He chose us “to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

4. This is the **purpose** of election.

a. God’s purpose in choosing us was that we might be **holy**.

The word holy means to be set apart. God chose us to be different from the people of the world.

We were chosen *to be* holy, not because we *were* holy. We were sinners, guilty, condemned, lost and dead, but God chose to set us apart for himself.

God chose us to be like him. Over and over he told the people of Israel; “Be holy because I the Lord your God, am holy.” He wants us to be like himself – pure, sinless, set apart from evil.

This holiness comes about through the Lord Jesus Christ; it is not our holiness.

God declares us righteous on the basis of the holiness of the Lord Jesus; God gives us, as sinners, a right standing with himself because of the righteous life and the saving death of Jesus.

But God does more than that: he also gives us his Holy Spirit so that we might actually *become* more and more righteous. The Spirit works in us and with us so that we become more sanctified, more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit works in us and with us so that we display this righteousness and holiness in our lives.

Some people object to this doctrine of God’s election by saying that it encourages people to sin, it will encourage careless lives; they will keep on sinning so that grace may increase (Rom 6:1). They claim people will think; “Well, I’m elected so I can do what I please”;

But that is a complete misunderstanding of the teaching of the Bible. God chose us in Christ *to be holy!* Those who are elected, and who are converted, and who do believe, *will* live holy lives. Your holy life is *proof* of your election in Christ.

b. God chose us in Christ to be holy and **blameless**.

The word can be translated as perfect or pure. God wants us to be without blemish. God commanded that about the Old Testament sacrifices. The people of Israel had to present an animal that was without blemish. They had to do this because those animals pointed forward to the Lord Jesus himself who was the Passover Lamb, the perfect man, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Again, as in holiness, God counts us as blameless before him on the basis of what Jesus did on the cross.

But he also works in us by his Spirit so that we might grow in this. This is the goal, the standard, the aim. Jesus said; “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48).

We won’t achieve perfection in this life. Some Christians have taught and believed this – that perfection is possible. But the Bible teaches us that we will struggle with our old sinful nature until the day we die. All of us who are Christians know what this is like and we struggle with it every day.

But one day we will be holy and blameless in his sight. God’s work of election began before the creation of the world and it will continue on until the end of this world.

The Greek phrase translated “in his sight” literally reads “before him”. One day all God’s chosen people, from all ages and places, will stand before that great throne in heaven, and we will be perfect, holy, blameless; not because of our work or efforts or deeds or trying hard, but because of the work of the Lord Jesus for us!

And as a result we will praise God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for this great salvation. This comes to its ultimate expression in the visions of John recorded in the book of Revelation; “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them singing; To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13)

This is the ultimate purpose of election.

Yes, the immediate purpose is that we should be holy and blameless before him.

But the grand purpose is that we should praise our God for such a marvellous salvation.

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight... to the praise of his glorious grace” (verses 4 and 6)!

Amen