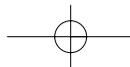
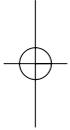


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# What Are Election and Predestination?

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## WHAT IS ELECTION?

*Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Eph. 1:4)*

■ **While I was ministering** in the city of Philadelphia, some large construction projects took place there. As I occasionally passed by these sites, I noticed how much work goes on underground before anything can be seen at level ground. Particularly with very tall buildings, a great deal of labor and care must be given to the foundation. If you want a building to stand fast, particularly one that reaches high into the sky, then you must dig deep and plant a very firm foundation.

The apostle Paul shows a similar concern when he constructs the edifice of Christian salvation according to God's plan. When he teaches on salvation, Paul intends for us to see a work of the ages that is infinitely high, that reaches up into the precincts of eternity and is shrouded in heavenly glory the way the highest peaks are clothed with mist and light. So he

## ■ Election and Predestination

begins by digging deep, setting the firmest possible foundation for what will reach up into heaven. God is leading us, Paul teaches, into eternity future, so it is in eternity past that God sets the groundwork of our security.

Of all the chapters in the Bible that present the doctrine of salvation, perhaps none is more thorough than the first chapter of Ephesians, where Paul recounts all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ. He begins by laying an eternal foundation, in verse 4: “[God] chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

## THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

Ephesians 1:4 provides one of the clearest statements of what is known as *the doctrine of election*. This doctrine gets its name from the Greek word *eklektos*, the verb form of which is translated here as “he chose.” When we elect a candidate, we choose him or her for public office. Likewise, God elects a people for himself to be saved into glory through the blood of Jesus Christ.

This verse and doctrine teach that all the blessings we enjoy as Christians are grounded in the sovereign choosing of God—his sovereign election—which took place in eternity past, long before we were born and even before creation itself. Here is the foundation on which the salvation of every believer rests: God’s own free and gracious choice of us. This is the strongest, firmest foundation possible—God’s own eternal purpose—and it is on this foundation that Paul would have us ground our hope for salvation. John Calvin, who is known for teaching this doctrine, writes:

## The Doctrine of Election ■

God having chosen us before the world had its course, we must attribute the cause of our salvation to His free goodness; we must confess that He did not take us to be His children, for any deserts of our own; for we had nothing to recommend ourselves into His favor. Therefore, we must put the cause and fountain of our salvation in Him only, and ground ourselves upon it.<sup>1</sup>

When did our election take place? Paul says we were chosen by God “before the foundation of the world.” How were we chosen? Paul answers that we were chosen “in him,” that is, in Christ. Perhaps the best way to understand this truth is to reflect on the eternal covenant spoken of in the Bible. Along with God the Father and God the Spirit, God the Son existed in eternity past, long before he took on our flesh and was laid in the manger at Bethlehem. The Bible gives ample testimony that there was a covenant, or agreement, in eternity between God the Father and God the Son, established in a pre-creation council. Hebrews 13:20 refers to this as “the eternal covenant.” Jesus mentioned it in his prayer on the night of his arrest: “Father, . . . I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Peter likewise speaks of Christ as the “lamb without blemish or spot . . . foreknown before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19–20). Revelation 13:8 calls Christ “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (NIV). These descriptions show us that even in eternity God was dealing with the problem of sin and sinners. His grace for salvation extends back into the infinite depths before time. Election is

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in Christ's blood, for God foresaw and ordained not only that we would exist but that we would need redemption from our sin; in choosing us as a people for himself, he also ordained the necessary means, namely, the shedding of the guiltless blood of Christ.

Theologians refer to this eternal council as *the covenant of redemption*. God the Father laid a charge on God the Son in behalf of his forechosen people. The Son voluntarily accepted this charge, namely, that he would take up their cause and die for them on the cross. In return, the Father promised him the salvation of all the elect, those chosen in eternity for eternal life as his people and bride.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of election cites this set purpose of God in Christ as the cause of our individual salvation. "Why is anyone a Christian?" we ask. One might answer, "Because he believed the gospel." That is an essential truth. But we go on to ask, "Why did he believe while others did not? Is it because of something within Christians that is more spiritual, that is better in some way, that enables them to believe while others hear the same message and do not?" The Bible answers, "No! It is not because of anything in them, but because of something in God, namely, his eternal and sovereign election of these individuals to be his own through faith in Jesus Christ."

This is good news to all who believe, for here is the foundation of your salvation—not something in you, who are so weak and changing, so mixed in your affections, so inconstant in your faith—God's own sovereign and unchangeable choice from eternity past. He "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."