

The sermon

Intro

This morning we're confronted with election and predestination.

Some of you love the topic and long for me to explain it with utmost clarity. You'll get your wish.

Some of you aren't so excited. Talking about election and predestination causes division. Election and predestination are unimportant for the Christian life. Paul can't possibly be saying what he appears to be saying.

Some of you are curious. No one ever seems to talk about election and predestination. It's in the Bible. I want answers.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Introduction

We're seven years after Paul left Ephesus.

Preliminary remarks on election and predestination

Before we begin, I have some questions.

1. Does God want us to know election and predestination?

The fact that they're in the Bible indicates, yes, God wanted us to know these things. Election and predestination are revealed to us, not hidden from us.

2. Is God able to communicate in an understandable way?

I'm hoping you'll answer yes.

If we approached everything else in the Bible like some approach election and predestination, we couldn't live the Christian life. Imagine a church where the pastor says we can't be sure what the gospel is, we can't be sure what faith is, we can't be sure what repentance is, we can't be sure what marriage is, etc.

3. Was God wise to reveal election and predestination to us?

I'm hoping you'll say yes.

If we think we shouldn't be talking about election and predestination we think we're wiser than God.

4. If there's debate and division and name-calling, where does the problem lie? In us or in God?

I'm hoping you'll say we're the problem.

Poor use of God's truth doesn't mean we should ignore God's truth.

5. How does God want us to respond to these truths?

That's the question we should be asking.

I'm putting a 100% positive spin on election and predestination. Because Paul puts a 100% positive spin on election and predestination.

BIG IDEA: God revealed election and predestination to stir us to praise

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

An apostle (Paul) is writing to a group of believers in a particular location: the Ephesian church. Paul's audience is Christian.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. – 1:2

Paul wishes them is empowering grace and peace for their present circumstances. And peaceful relationship with one another.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, – 1:3

To bless God means to praise God for “*every spiritual blessing*” he’s given us (e.g., forgiveness of sins, a new heart to fight sin, the Bible, the local church, gifted teachers, that believer who encourages you, etc.).

Who are the “*us*”? The “*us*” are Paul and his readers, the Ephesian church. The “*us*” is believers. So if you’ve believed in Jesus and repented of your sins, the “*us*” is you.

“in Christ”

What is meant by “*in Christ*”?

“*in*” could mean Jesus is the **place** in which spiritual blessings are found. We need a personal relationship with Jesus to experience “*every spiritual blessing.*”

“*in*” could mean Jesus is the **means** that brings spiritual blessings to sinners. His death on the cross.

“**in Christ**” means Jesus is the place (or person) where spiritual blessings are found and the instrument (or cause) of the spiritual blessings we possess.

Spiritual blessings come to sinners only through Jesus Christ. Not through Buddha, Mohammed, the Republican party, American citizenship, etc.

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,

“*even as*” would be better translated “for” as in the CSB, NET, NIV. 1:4 begins to explain how God has blessed us. 1:4-5 explain the nature of “*every spiritual blessing in Christ.*”

“he choose us”

The “*he*” is God the Father. So who’s doing the choosing? God the Father. Who did the Father choose? “*us*” Who’s the “*us*”? Paul and the Ephesian believers.

Paul, writing to a Christian congregation, says all of us have been chosen. Every last one. If you are a Christian today, God the Father chose you. Individually.

What does chose mean? To choose someone or something from a larger group. Out of all the world’s peoples, God chose Israel. From the world, God chose Paul and the Ephesian believers.

“**he chose us in him**” means election depends on Christ’s work on the cross. If Jesus wasn’t predestined to go to the cross, no one could have been chosen. God could not chose people and remain just if there was no cross. Election requires the cross.

before the foundation of the world,

When did the choosing take place? “*before the foundation of the world.*” When only God existed.

If you find yourself a believer today, God chose you individually “*before the foundation of the world.*”

that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Why did God choose some people? “*that we should be holy and blameless before him.*” The “*we*” = Paul and the Ephesian believers. All believers. “*before him*” could picture us standing before God on the day of judgment.

I take holy and blameless to mean both declared holy and practically holy.

Note God didn't chose us because he foresaw that we would believe, turn out good, etc. He chose us so that we would turn out good. God saw a problem. He saw the fall. He saw us as sinners. So he chose to rescue us.

“*that*” indicates purpose and result. If God didn't chose us, we'd never be holy and blameless. If God were to remedy our predicament, he had to do something. So he chose us. To ensure his desired outcome: “*that we should be holy and blameless before him.*” Election secures the intended result: a holy and blameless people.

In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ,

Who predestined? The Father.

Who did God predestine? “*us*” = Paul and the Ephesians. All believers.

Why did God predestine us? Because he loved us. Predestination wasn't a random flip of the coin. It was a personal act of love.

God's love here is:

- 1) Unconditional.

There was nothing in us that caused him to choose us. There was nothing that made us worthy of being chosen. He saw us as sinners. Election is unconditional.

- 2) Personal (chose you specifically).
- 3) Selective (didn't choose everyone).
- 4) Effectual.

Those chosen and predestined without fail become adopted.

What did God predestine us for? “*adoption through Jesus Christ.*” Adoption is the loving act of taking a child who is not your own and legally taking them as your own child. Choosing to set your love on a child and care for them.

“*through Jesus Christ*” = without Jesus' death on the cross we couldn't be adopted. Adoption required the cross.

chosen for salvation

Chosen to be holy and blameless = chosen for salvation on the last day. Predestined for adoption = chosen to become God's child. Chosen for personal relationship with Jesus. These truths mean if you've repented and believed, you were chosen to be saved “*before the foundation of the world.*”

This gives so much life to other statements like God's promise “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

Christian, God committed himself to you before you ever existed. He ensured your eternal destiny before you ever existed. How could you possibly believe he could forsake you?

Christian, you did nothing to merit his love. He loved you in your sinful state. He chose you to be his own. How could you possibly believe his love comes and goes depending on your performance?

Christian, when life is torture... God chose me before the foundation of the world. Satan says, "look at your life. Is it obvious God doesn't care?" I answer back, God chose me and predestined me for salvation before the foundation of the world." Satan silenced.

according to the purpose of his will,

Why did God predestine us for adoption? Because he wanted to.

"*according to*" = the basis upon which God did the predestining (and choosing) was his own will. It's what God wanted to do.

The ESV differs with most translations choosing "*purpose*" instead of "good pleasure" or "kind intention." "according to the good pleasure of his will" is better. The idea is God predestined us to be adopted because he was pleased to decide in this way. Christian, it brought God pleasure and delight and joy to set his love on you and predestine your adoption.

to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. – 1:6

Why election and predestination? So that we would be his holy and blameless adopted children. Why has God revealed election and predestination to us? So that we would praise "*his glorious grace.*"

Did you catch that? Paul calls us to praise God's grace after discussing election and predestination. Meaning election and predestination belong to the category grace. The writer of Amazing Grace understood election and predestination the way I've presented this morning.

"*in the Beloved*" = in Christ.

Why did God elect and predestine before creation?

1. Because he pitied us in our sinful state.
2. Because he loved us.
3. Because it pleased him to do so.
4. To render certain his intended result: a holy and blameless, adopted people.
5. To create praise.

What is election? God chose certain individuals for salvation before time began.

What is predestination? God determined, before time began, that the people he chose would experience salvation.

What's the biblical response? Praise. Delight. Thanksgiving. Assurance of God's love. Humility. There's nothing good in me. I couldn't even chose to believe if I wasn't chosen. Encouragement in evangelism. There are people out there God has chosen. They will believe.

John 6

Christian, we were confronted with the gospel. And we chose to believe. Then we discover in our Bibles that we believed because God chose us.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will

of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. – **John 6:35-39**

The Father gives a group of people to Jesus. All of these people are certain to come. Jesus' task is to ensure that every one of these people be raised on the last day. That every person the Father gives him will be saved.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. – **John 6:44**

No one is able to come to Jesus = no one is able to believe. Unless drawn. And the "him" who is drawn is the "him" who is raised. Meaning everyone who is drawn comes. Drawing is the mechanism by which the Father ensures the chosen will believe. The word draw is used of dragging people by force (Acts 16:19; 21:30; Jas 2:6) and hauling fish (John 21:6, 11). How does God ensure the chosen believe? Drawing.

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." – **John 6:65**

Jesus is explaining unbelief. No one can come, no one can believe, unless God grants them the ability to do. The Father draws some. The drawn come.

The idea is, because of our sinful nature, no one would ever come willingly. Without election and predestination, no one would ever believe. God draws us in such a way that we willingly come.

Human responsibility?

I'm not saying we're robots. People make choices every day. A person chooses what they'll eat, what they'll wear, whether they'll go to work or call in sick. Christians make choices every day. Will I read my Bible? Will I pray? Will I obey what I read? Will I harass someone about election?

God holds us accountable for these choices at the final judgment.

What election and predestination teach us is that no one would ever chose to believe if God had not chosen them for salvation. We don't want God. That's the problem election and predestination solves.

Friend in the hall

I remember the first time anyone explained this to me. My response? You're crazy. If that's true, I don't need to evangelize.

Short response? God draws the chosen through the gospel.

Bible study in Bethesda

I was saved two years and leading a Bible study. We were all friends. Election came up. Three of them shared the view I'm sharing with you. I was passionately opposed.

I kept shouting 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:6 over and over again. They kept on saying, what about Romans 9? They challenged me to explain what the words in Romans 9 meant. I ignored the challenge. I had never wrestled with Romans 9. I just kept saying, "but 2 Peter 3:9 says this."

Seminary

During my first semester of seminary, the systematic theology professors presented election as I have this morning. That and reading John Piper led me to these conclusions.

In 2014, I attempted to revisit this subject with an open mind. I focused on learning how those who rejected this understanding of Ephesians 1 explained passages like Romans 9. I concluded taking Ephesians 1 in a straightforward manner was better than trying to explain it away.

Pastoral thoughts

God's goal in revealing these things wasn't infighting. Paul's goal was to provoke praise.

My friends and I were able to discuss frankly without offense because we evangelized together. We prayed for one another. We encouraged each other. We had more than one agenda. We didn't harass each other. We valued doctrine, but we didn't make our entire relationship about one doctrine.

I can joyfully pastor you if you disagree.

My challenge is this. Have I inserted something that isn't there? Or have I simply pulled out what's there?

Social experiment

I have a habit of having my kids read Scripture out loud and then explain what the words mean. I don't allow guesses. I don't allow assumptions. I force them to wrestle with the words and pull out what's there. So this Tuesday I had Anna and Luke explain Ephesians 1:3-6 to me. We had never discussed election. They got it. Questions like does God love everybody? came up. To my delight, they said "if it's in the Bible, we have to believe it. If Jesus says it (John 6), it has to be true."

I know this raises questions. Send me questions. More on this in Ephesians 2.

How can I know I've been chosen?

Have you repented of your sins and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you trusting Jesus today? Is there evidence of a changed life that's been born again by the Spirit? No mystery here. If you have been saved, you were chosen. Paul assures every Ephesian believer that they have been chosen.

Jonathan Edwards & Measured Progress

You're visiting with us today, and if you're tracking with me, your thoughts are racing.

I'll put it like this. Twenty years ago I was working a temp job and I had a Jonathan Edwards book. A non-Christian co-worker knew who Jonathan Edwards was and what he believed (election and predestination). The co-worker was laughing about how ridiculous such doctrines were.

I told him Edwards is right. These doctrines are true. But you're still responsible to repent and believe.

Friend, God has chosen a people to experience forgiveness of sins and live with him forever and ever in world without sin and suffering. God forgives these people on the basis of Jesus' death. Become one of those people. Turn from your sins by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.