

Ephesians Lesson 1 Article

We are to remember that the apostle does not use the terms *election* and *predestination* in some vague, philosophical sense of grim determinism. We must understand these concepts in two very important broader contexts.

The *first* is that election and predestination belong to the whole scope of salvation. That may be obvious, but so often when we struggle with the doctrine of predestination and election it is because our eyes are always fixed on the difficulty of resolving predestination with human freedom. The Bible, however, links them with salvation, which every Christian should find enormously comforting. Salvation is not an afterthought of God. The redemption of his people, the salvation of his church, my eternal salvation, these actions are not a postscript to the Divine activity. Instead, from the very foundation of the world, God had a sovereign plan to save a significant portion of the human race, and he moves heaven and earth to bring it to pass.

Secondly, this matter of individuals being chosen before the foundation of the world by the predestinating love of God is always understood to be *in Christ*. It is with a view to Christ that believers were incorporated in the Divine plan of salvation.

But what we see here is that our election is *in Christ*. Christ is the Beloved and we are chosen by the Father *in* the Beloved, and *for* the Beloved. Remember Jesus' prayer in the upper room, when he thanks the Father for those whom the Father has given him, and his exclamation of confidence that all that the Father has given to him will come to him (John 17).

God chose his people in Christ, before the creation of the world, *to be holy and blameless in his sight*: that is, he set them apart to be a consecrated people, known as saints. Again, the goal of predestination is *adoption*. It was God's good pleasure not only to prepare the kingdom for his Son, but also for those whom he adopted in his Son, the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Election is in Christ, leading to adoption into the family of God.

Paul says that God has done this in *accordance with his pleasure and will*. This is the only reason to be found in Scripture that explains why God elects people for salvation. The reason for election is not my foreseen righteousness; or my foreseen obedience; or my foreseen response to the gospel.

Where we struggle with predestination is at this point: that God leaves some to themselves, but in other cases he intervenes. He gives a blessing to his elect that he does not give to other people. This means that God does not treat everybody alike. Indeed, Scripture from beginning to end makes it abundantly clear that God doesn't treat everybody the same. He appeared to Abraham, called him out of godless paganism and made him the father of a great nation, but he did not do that for Pharaoh. Jesus appeared to the enemy of the church, Paul, on the road to Damascus and overcame his unbelief right there, but he did not do that for Pontius Pilate or for Caiaphas. Would it not be a ghastly thing to suggest that the reason why Jesus revealed himself to Paul and not to Pilate, was because Paul in some manner deserved or earned or merited that special revelation?

Why doesn't God give his grace to everyone? It is certainly a legitimate question, but we do not know the answer. We might suggest that God is honored when his justice is manifested in leaving some to the punishment their sins deserve, and he is honored when his grace is manifested in the salvation of his elect. Of course, God is also just when he gives grace, for election is inseparably bound up with Christ. It is for the sake of the Beloved, and not just because of God's love for us, that there is redemption at all. God honors his Beloved Son by creating from fallen humanity new vessels of life, a new humanity, a new household of faith, that he calls his church, those who are called out from this world, according to the sovereign plan of Divine election.¹

¹ Sproul, R. C. (1994). *The Purpose of God: Ephesians* (22–26). Scotland: Christian Focus Publications.