



It's All God

Ephesians 1:1-14

Week 2 | Jan 14, 2018

Summary: Everything about our life and faith is profoundly divine. It is all of God. From God's choice of us in eternity past, to our present status as his children, to our future hope and glory, God is central. Paul celebrates this with a complex, 201-word, God-saturated sentence: Ephesians 1:3-14. But there's so much man-centeredness, so much *me* in religion (even in Christianity) that such an eruption of praise might strike us as superfluous. Many readers skim through texts like this, wanting to get to the material about me, my problems, and how I should live. But mature believers like Paul would say that the God-centered material is the good stuff. It's the core of our faith, the foundation of our hope, the essence of love. Without Ephesians 1 there is no me, at least no me who is in Christ. But because of our **election, redemption, and salvation**—and a myriad other graces—we lose ourselves in God and extol him for every spiritual blessing that we have in Christ.

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 1:1-14 slowly and meditatively. As you do, ask each person to choose one phrase that they find most awe-inspiring. After the reading, share these with each other.
2. Now look over the text again and choose which phrase you find most confusing or disturbing. Share these.
3. Most of us will find the ideas of election and predestination most problematic. We feel like these doctrines infringe on the freedom of those who are chosen, and make God unfair toward those who are not chosen. How do you wrestle with these problems? How do you respond?
4. Another objection to the doctrine of election is that it's a disincentive to evangelism. (If God chooses, what's the point in sharing the gospel?) But look at the following texts. How does the doctrine of election actually empower and embolden evangelism?
 - Acts 13:44-48
 - Acts 16:11-14
 - Acts 18:9-11
5. Jesus said that no one can come to him unless the Father first draws him (John 6:44). Think about your story, whether you're a confirmed Christian or still inquiring about the faith: Can you discern ways in which God has drawn you? How would you describe his movements in your life?
6. What would you say to someone who is worried that he or she is not chosen?

Glossary of terms

Free Will	The idea that humans are endowed with the ability to make choices utterly freely; that is, arbitrarily and without regard to reasons or desires. But a biblical view of the will is that it is substantially free, but not utterly so. We are conditioned to choose certain things based on a myriad of factors. Most notably, we are bound to choose Self over God because our minds are blinded and our wills are in bondage to sin and death.
Determinism	The unbiblical belief that humans are not free at all, but their choices are coerced by external cosmic forces.
Fatalism	The unbiblical belief that human choices are meaningless because events are fixed in advance in such a way that we are powerless to change them.
Election	The choice of God in eternity past to save some people by grace, regardless of any merits on their part, but only because of his good pleasure. Some say that election refers to God's choice of Christ to be the savior of the world, or the church to be God's people, or certain individuals to carry out their ministry—but we cannot limit election to these special cases; it applies to God's saving choice of each individual.
Predestination	The expression of God's sovereignty in preparing the way for some to be saved. Some people believe in "double predestination," that God chooses some to be saved and some to be condemned, and does so <i>in exactly the same way</i> . But a close reading of the Bible shows that God is active in predestining and saving the elect, but much more passive in leaving the reprobate in their sins.

In the end, there are really only three options for the way election and predestination can work:

1. God chooses no one to be saved.
2. God chooses everyone to be saved.
3. God chooses some to be saved.

The Bible reveals option 3 to be God's sovereign will. We cannot venture to say much regarding why God so ordained things, but apparently he gets maximum glory and does maximum good in this way. His glory would be diminished if none were saved, or if all people were robotically forced to be saved. But by saving some—many!—by opening their hearts in repentance and faith, God gains maximum glory. He shows the beauty of heaven against the backdrop of hell; the diamond of his love against the black velvet of sin and death. He is seen and known and loved best in this way.

In defense of God's character and perfection, we can add at least two points: First, we must understand that God is under no obligation to save anyone. In fact, if he did not graciously act to save us, no one would escape judgment. Second, the Bible never presents a person's condemnation as the "fault" of God not choosing them. Rather, it is their own wickedness, sin, and rebellion.

So however election works—and we are two year-olds here standing on the edge of the ocean—there is perfect compatibility between God's sovereign choice in salvation and humanity's moral responsibility in judgment. Moreover, the heart of God is that none would perish (2 Peter 3:9). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). Rather, God freely offers salvation to all who come to him (John 6:37; Revelation 22:17). No one who has an inkling of desire for God's grace and forgiveness should fear that they are not elect. Rather, they make their calling and election sure by trusting and following Christ (1 Peter 1:10).

