

# Every Spiritual Blessing

## Part I: The Father

**Ephesians 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,  
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Je-  
sus:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Je-  
sus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> 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,

<sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world,  
that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

<sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Je-  
sus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed  
us in the Beloved.

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness  
of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

<sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his  
purpose, which he set forth in Christ

<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him,  
things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predes-  
tined according to the purpose of him who works all things ac-  
cording to the counsel of his will,

<sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the  
praise of his glory.

<sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel  
of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the  
promised Holy Spirit,

Father  
Predestined  
it

Son  
Paid for it

Spirit  
Applied it

<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

(Eph 1:1-14)

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## Superlative

EPHESIANS HAS BEEN CALLED “Queen of the Epistles,”<sup>1</sup> “the crown of St. Paul’s writings,”<sup>2</sup> “not merely ... the crown and climax of the Pauline theology, but of the New Testament as a whole,”<sup>3</sup> “pure music,”<sup>4</sup> “the Grand Canyon of Scripture,”<sup>5</sup> “the divinest composition of man,”<sup>6</sup> “the greatest piece of writing in all history.”<sup>7</sup>

It is nearly **perfectly symmetrical** in its movements from theology to ethics, doctrine to duty, identity to responsibility, heavenly standing to earthly walk, who we are in Christ

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<sup>1</sup> **William Barclay**, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, orig. 1954), 82.

<sup>2</sup> **J. Armitage Robinson**, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians: A Revised Text and Translation with Exposition and Notes*, Second Edition. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1907), vii.

<sup>3</sup> **J. Scott Lidgett**, *God in Christ Jesus: A Study of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: C. H. Kelly, 1915), 3.

<sup>4</sup> **John A. Mackay**, *God’s Order: The Ephesian Letter and This Present Time* (New York: Nisbet and Macmillan, 1953), 9–10, 33.

<sup>5</sup> **Ruth Paxson**, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian* (New York: Revell, 1939), 11–12.

<sup>6</sup> **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, “Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge: May 25, 1830, ‘Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians—Oaths,’” in *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. VI (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884), 321.

<sup>7</sup> **W. O. Carver**, *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1949), 3.

to who Christ is through us, the finished work of Christ to the faithful walk of the Christian, our privileges to our responsibilities as believers, our beliefs to our behaviors.<sup>8</sup> In this way, it gives as I like to say, plenty of milk before letting us dig in to the meat (most think doctrine is meat and ethics is milk, it is the other way).

<b>Symmetry of Ephesians</b>	
<b>Ephesians 1-3</b>	<b>Ephesians 4-6</b>
The Root	The Fruit
Spiritual Wealth	Spiritual Walk
Christian Privilege	Christian Conduct
Position of the Believer	Practice of the Believer
God Sees Us in Christ	World Sees Christ in Us
Privilege	Practice
Doctrine	Duty
Doctrinal	Practical
Revelation	Responsibility
Christian Blessings	Christian Behavior
Belief	Behavior
Privileges of the Believer	Responsibilities of the Believer
Heritage in Christ	Life in Christ
Finished Work of Christ	Faithful Walk of the Christian
Word of Christ in Us	Work of Christ through Us
Us in Christ	Christ in Us
Heavenly Standing	Earthly Walk
Identity	Responsibility
Position of the Believer	Practice of the Believer
Theology	Ethics

<sup>8</sup> The following chart is adapted from “Ephesians 1 Resources,” (2-7-2018), [https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians\\_1\\_resources](https://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_1_resources). I cannot figure out its original source.

# EPHESIANS

	<b>Our Position in Christ</b>	<b>Our Practice on Earth</b>	
<i>Introduction (1:1-2)</i>	Section 1: What God has done for us (1) Emphasis: sovereignty	Section 1: Our new unity (4:1-16)	<i>Conclusion (6:21-24)</i>
	Section 2: What Christ has done in us (2:1-10) Emphasis: grace	Section 2: Our new walk (4:17-6:9)	
	Section 3: What Christ has done between us (2:11-3:21) Emphasis: reconciliation	Section 3: Our new strength (6:10-20)	
	<i>CHAPTERS</i> 1-3	<i>CHAPTERS</i> 4-6	
<b>Emphasis</b>	Doctrinal: vertical relationship with God	Practical: horizontal relationship with others	
<b>Core Phrase</b>	“He chose us in Him.” (1:4)	“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling.” (4:1)	
<b>Subjects</b>	Declarations of heavenly truths (God’s accomplishments)	Exhortations for earthly living (Christians’ assignments)	
<b>Prayers</b>	Paul’s prayer for Ephesians (1:15-23)	Paul’s prayer for the whole church (3:14-21)	Christians’ prayers for one another (6:18-20)
<b>Theme</b>	The holy community God is creating and how it is to live out its calling		
<b>Key Verses</b>	1:9-10; 4:1-3		
<b>Christ in Ephesians</b>	Jesus is the source of spiritual blessing, the Cornerstone of the church, and the goal of spiritual maturity (1:3; 2:20; 4:11-16).		

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Today we begin looking at **Ephesians 1:1-14**, the part that begins the theology. This is the basics, the stuff you need to know first. We can break it into **two sections**. First, there is the short **formal greeting (Eph 1:1-2)**. Second, there is a lengthy **benediction of praise (3-14)**, “**What Jewish writers called a *berakah* or ‘praise cry,’ in which God is thanked for the blessings he has poured out upon his people.**”<sup>9</sup> In fact, this second section is renowned for several reasons. The

<sup>9</sup> **Grant R. Osborne**, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 6.

most interesting is that vv. 3-14 “constitutes the longest sentence ever discovered in the Greek language.”<sup>10</sup> Sinclair Ferguson calls it, “A sentence begun in eternity.”<sup>11</sup> We will see why soon enough.

## Greetings

It is easy in a letter such as this to just take for granted the opening verses. There’s so much that immediately follows, the temptation is to skip right past them. But everything in God’s word matters. There are no pointless verses. Though this greeting is pretty standard as far as those things go, it nevertheless teaches us some important things.

### *Author: Paul*

First, it identifies the author. “Paul” (Eph 1:1). This is clearly the Paul who wrote over a dozen NT letters. In modern scholarship, it is easy to find skeptics here. They argue that this is a pseudepigrapha (*pseudo* = false; *epigraph* = writing), a common enough style of writing at that time period, and leave it at that. Of course, if you are skeptical about

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Let’s Study Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 7.

more than just authorship, this would have the added bonus of casting a shadow on the rest of the letter.

But I'm not. It tells us that this is Paul and there is no manuscript evidence that it ever read anything else. This Paul calls himself, “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1). “Apostle” means “sent-one” or “messenger” (like “angel”). His apostleship comes from meeting the risen Savior, after Christ's ascension, as this zealous Jew was on the Damascus road making his way to murder Christians. This is such an important event in Paul's life that it appears three times in Acts (Acts 9; 22; 26) and also in some of his other letters (cf. 1Co 15:8). His apostleship gives him his authority, much like a prophet in the OT who met with the Word of God and spoke the words of the Word. There are no more apostles in this sense and haven't been since the first century.

The means by which he became an apostle is important, for it foreshadows much of the first chapter's praise-cry. “By the will of God” (Eph 1:1). This same “will” returns in vs. 5. He did not seek this apostleship. Actually, it was the opposite. He hated these Christians and the “messiah” they were worshipping. But Jesus arrested this man on that road because it was the will of God to save him. This “will of God” is not God's command, though he did command Paul to do

this. Rather, it refers to **God's sovereign purpose in eternity past**. It refers to God's election of him. This electing love not only saved him but appointed him for a task that of all people ever born, perhaps only he was able to carry out—to become the great missionary to the Gentiles.

### *People: "Faithful Saints"*

This takes us to **the place of the letter**. "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:1). There are **two parts** to this. The first refers to the **kind of people** he is writing to. The second refers to **where they are located**.

The kind of people are "**saints**." It is classic Pauline language to refer in his letters to certain people. The word is *hagios* and it means "holy." It is rarely used in the LXX of God's people, though it does appear a few times (cf. **Ps 16:3; 34:9; Dan 7:18-27**). "Holy" means something totally other, set apart, special, uncommon, sanctified. When it speaks of people it means righteous or, as he says here, "**faithful**" or perhaps "**trusting**" (CJB) in Christ Jesus. The main point is that these are not just people who others call Christians be-



cause they go to church, or because their parents are Christians, or are born in a Christian nation. Rather, these are people who 1. **Believe** in Christ and 2. **Demonstrate** it by their actions. That is, they have faith and are faithful, loyal, obedient to the Lord. This is “who” he is writing to.

*Place: “At Ephesus”*

More difficult is **where these Christians are located**. By most translations you would not think this is difficult for it says they are “**in Ephesus**.” However, if you were reading the RSV you would note that this phrase is missing.<sup>12</sup> This is because a few of the most ancient and trusted manuscripts do not have the phrase. However, the vast majority of manuscripts do have it. Furthermore, as early as perhaps the late first century, **Ignatius** writes to Ephesus and uses this letter, and even when a few of the Church Fathers were aware of some copies that didn’t have the phrase or believed that the

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<sup>12</sup> The family tree of the RSV (including the ERV of 1881, the ASV of 1901, and the NASB of 1971 all cast doubt on the phrase even though they have it, they put it in italics. Most of our English Bible’s will note that several of the most ancient and trusted manuscripts do not have the phrase. Technically, there are five of them.

The fourth-century codex Vaticanus (B) and codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ), a third-century papyrus codex from the Chester Beatty collection (P<sup>46</sup>), and two minuscule (cursive) manuscripts dating to the tenth and thirteenth centuries respectively (designated as 1739 and 6).



phrase was not original, they all believed this letter was written to the Ephesians (even if it was also a circular letter) by Paul.<sup>13</sup> **The reason** for talking about this here is that I made a big deal in our introductory sermon that the setting of Ephesians is essential for a good interpretation of much of this letter. There is little reason to doubt that Paul wrote this to the Christians at Ephesus, so those thoughts stand.

### *The God of Grace*

Finally, he ends the greeting with “**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (**Eph 1:2**). This is again pretty standard but always important. The purpose of the letter is **to impart grace and peace** to those who read it. This grace comes not from Paul but from “**God our Father**.” I can’t help but think that in the Apostle’s mind he is contrasting the Father with the Sovereign of Ephesus, the Earth-Mother Artemis. No, Christian, there is no comparison. The goddess cannot and did not do the things of which we are about to speak. This glory belongs to God the Father. Only God can grant grace, and so it is important that

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<sup>13</sup> A good discussion is **Clinton E. Arnold**, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 23-29.

Jesus Christ his Son is also granting grace and peace, for it means that he, too, is God. Therefore, may all of our study of this wonderful book be to the end that we might find grace and be at peace through its contents.

## Five Spiritual Triune Blessings

From here, the Apostle launches into his other-worldly prayer that sprang forth from depths of eternity. By my count there are **202 Greek words** in this one majestic sentence. This becomes 248 words in the English ESV (which is nearly equal the Gettysburg address), 308 in The Message Bible, and 386 in the Amplified Bible! That's a lot of content.

It is also an amazing amount of doctrine. In fact, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones finds it so other-worldly enthralling that he has 23 sermons for this one sentence!<sup>14</sup> I'm not going to take that long. I will tell you that as I break the sentence down, I find **five subpoints** that fall under a **Triune ordering** which flow from **one single great thesis**.

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<sup>14</sup> **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1978).

## *Every Spiritual Blessing*

The thesis is found in **vs. 3**. God has “**blessed us ... with every spiritual blessing.**” These blessings are not necessarily physical, though physical blessings can sometimes result from them. They are spiritual blessings. That is, they are real blessings, but they are not tangible to the senses. You can’t put them under a microscope and do an examination on them.

They are **heavenly** in nature. They are blessings “**in the heavenly places.**” Lloyd-Jones says, “**In many ways the expression ‘in heavenly places’ is the key to this particular Epistle.**”<sup>15</sup> I couldn’t agree more. The phrase appears five times (**1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12**). **Christ is seated** at the Father’s right hand *in heavenly places* (**1:20**). **We are seated** with him through his resurrection *in heavenly places* (**2:6**)! The church’s mission makes known **the manifold wisdom** of God about these things to the rulers and authorities *in heavenly places* (**3:10**). **Our struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil *in the heavenly places* (**6:10**). Hence, the introductory sermon.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

In our verse (1:3), every spiritual blessing comes from heaven, not earth. Like so much in this book, these blessings are supernatural in origin and nature. They come from God, from the Father, through the Son and Spirit. They are not bestowed by any man or other god. They will present themselves fully in eternity, but they break through in powerful ways even now. If you do not get this point, then you have failed to grasp Christianity at its core. Our religion does not derive from the imaginations of men, nor from the minds of wicked angels fallen to earth. Its source is the very throne of God, and he has the power to give blessings to people that the world knows nothing about. And indeed, we have them all!

### *Triune Blessings*

So what are these blessings? They are the five subpoints. First is [predestination](#), second is [redemption](#), third is knowing [the mystery of his will](#), fourth is the [divine plan](#), fifth is the [sealing of the Holy Spirit](#).<sup>16</sup> Curiously, as you can hear,

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<sup>16</sup> Osborne, *Ephesians* Outline.

the last blessing comes by the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> The three before that come from the Son, and the one before that comes from the Father. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in that order. Today, we will only look at the first.

The Triune Praise-Cry	
The Father Predestined It	1:3-6
The Son Paid for It	1:7-12
The Spirit Applied It	1:13-14

### *Spiritual Blessing #1: Predestination by the Father*

This first of these blessings comes from the Father. It is discussed in **vv. 4-6**. “Even as he chose us in him ... he predestined us.” **Choosing and predestination**. This is the language of **the doctrine of election**, and it is called a spiritual blessing. We are going to spend some time on this.

Any of these words—predestination, choosing, election—are words that **ruffle not a few feathers**. I’ve witnessed it firsthand scores of times. Over the years I’ve thought about why this is. Of several possible reasons, I

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<sup>17</sup> **Irving L. Jensen**, *Jensen’s Survey of the New Testament* (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 1981), 319-320. This is a great little resource that I only discovered this week. It has tons of helpful charts and summaries with easy to memorize and remember tools.

want to give you two. **First**, the person is simply not a Christian. The reason this doctrine might make someone mad, especially a religious person who claims to be something they are not, is because more than any other doctrine, election exposes their unrepentant heart by giving all the glory for salvation to God.

As sinners, Christian or not, we do not like this in our flesh. If we are not spiritual because we are not converted, then there is nothing in us that would like this idea. It goes against every fiber of our naturally democratic and Pelagian views of ourselves. We like to think we are basically good and completely free to vote and decide outcomes however we like. This is exponentially truer for people living in a country like ours where everything in the culture reinforces this. Therefore, if as you continue to hear me discuss this passage you feel yourself getting angry, look deep inside of yourself and ask yourself if you are converted, if your hatred of this doctrine stems from a desire to be free of the shackles of an omnipotent, sovereign God.

There is a **second** reason I think this doctrine is despised. This has to do with Christians simply not understanding things properly. Sometimes the problem is **bad education**. They were taught wrongly. Sometimes that is in innocence

by the teacher, because he doesn't know it himself. Other times it is malicious such as when the doctrine is slandered on purpose.

Other times it is **lack of education** altogether. Many people **don't like to talk about** this doctrine. Some don't like controversy. I've seen this many times personally, but it is nothing new. German Reformer Martin Bucer (1491–1551) said,

There are some people who think that divine election is a subject that should not be talked about publicly. But given that God's blessings are meant to be increased, the greatest of them can hardly go unmentioned. On the contrary, as Paul's example shows, it is to be celebrated, and faith in election is to be confirmed in people's minds. The children of God do not have to worry that talking about election will lead to the destruction of all life and religion.

(**Bucer**, *Lectures on Ephesians*).<sup>18</sup>

Others are **scared** by it. Another German Reformer, Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) said,

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<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Reformation quotes are found in **Timothy F. George**, *Galatians, Ephesians: New Testament*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture vol. 10, ed. Gerald L. Bray and Scott M. Manetsch (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).



Predestination frightens many worldly people, so much so that they are bold enough to ask their Lord and Creator, “Why did you make me like this?” (Rom 9:20). But their complaints about predestination are completely silenced by this verse ... It is a huge comfort to spiritual people, because when they are in trouble, they can rest assured and even boast in the face of Satan because they have been chosen [by God] from eternity. The Lord cared about you before the world was made, before you ever existed, so how much more will he care about you now that the world has been created and you have appeared in it?

(Johannes Brenz, *Unpublished Commentary on Ephesians*)

## *The Opposite of Predestination?*

To help you think through this, I want to ask a question. What do you suppose is **the opposite of predestination**? I think there are several possible answers to this question. I think the most popular is that people think the opposite is **freewill**. Therefore, since they are opposites, they are mutually exclusive. It's either one or the other. It is true that people on both sides of the Arminian-Calvinist debate have gone off the rails both sides of this. One thinks there is *only freewill* and that predestination is rooted in God seeing our

choice, thereby turning [predestination](#) into [postobservation](#). The other *denies freewill altogether*. But it is far and away more common to see people deny God's sovereign choice in order to preserve freewill.

The main problem with this thinking is that, biblically speaking, it just isn't true. The opposite of freewill is not predestination. It isn't either freewill or predestination. [The opposite of freewill is \*the bondage of the will\*](#). Your will is either free or it is a slave. The existence of the human will is not in question anywhere in biblical thought. Its freedom to act apart from human sinful nature very much is.

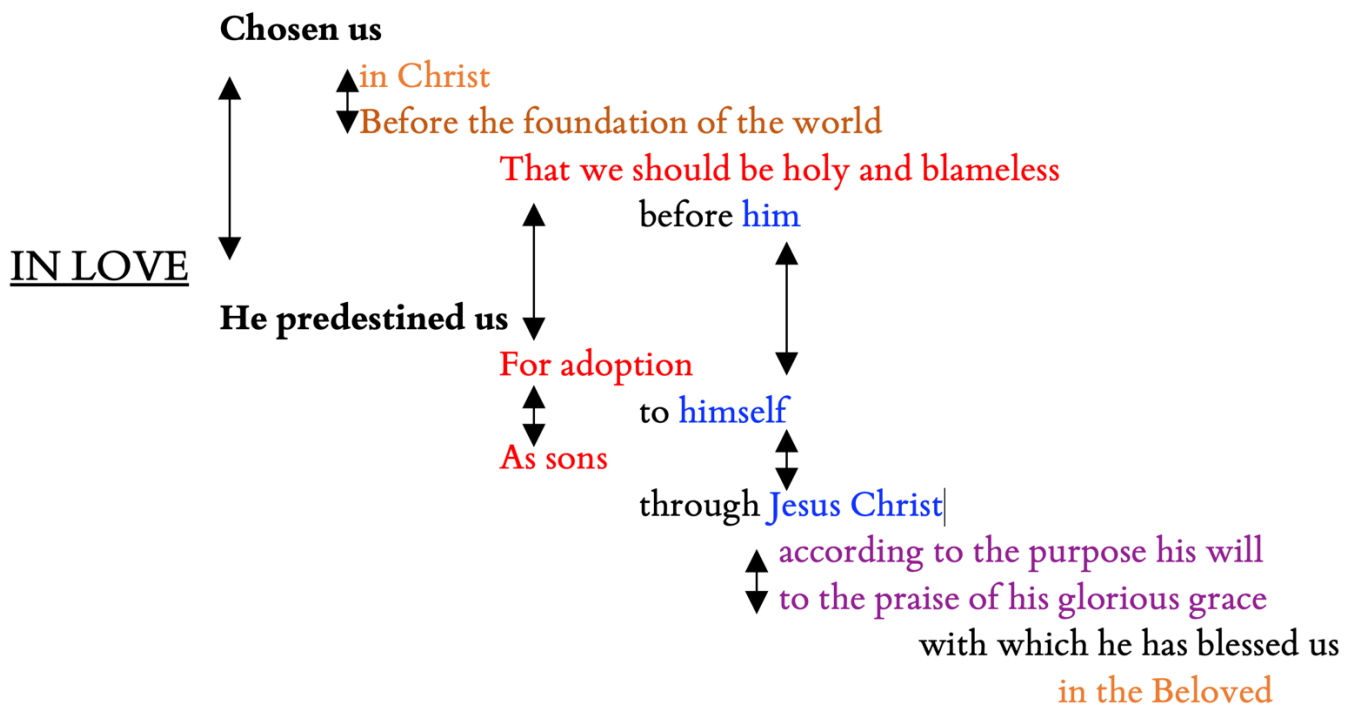
If freewill isn't the opposite, then what might be? There are a few other answers to try. The first is what antonym dictionaries often say: [fate or chance](#). This is taking the "destiny" side of the word without the "pre." The "pre" gives destiny intention and purpose that comes from a Mind. Otherwise, destiny is just dumb blind luck. What is fate or chance or luck? They are impersonal, unintelligent forces that are thought to somehow guide the future even though they have no capability of thinking, acting, or doing anything because they are literally no-things. This is obviously the opposite of a biblical worldview, something you might find residing in Ephesus, but certainly not in the Apostles.

Another option is that because of the word “destination” we might say that the opposite would be “no-destination” or going the opposite of the destination. Since the Bible only uses the language of “choosing” or “election” or “predestination” for **going to heaven**, then this would be the destination. Its opposite would be not going to heaven. In fact, Scripture uses this exact idea for the “destiny” of the non-elect. It never says that God chooses them or predestines them to hell for the exact reason that they are *already going there* by nature. As we will see later in Ephesians, people are born children of wrath. God doesn’t have to *do* or *choose* anything. He just lets them be. “**God gave them over**” to do exactly what they wanted, is the language of Rom 1. And what they want is to hate him, do their own thing, and go to hell. Many of you have told me you know people who have told you that very thing.

That doesn’t mean that God is not sovereign over the destiny of the non-elect. Rather, he actively chooses to do nothing. Even in the case of Adam and Eve, God actively chose to leave rather than stay, to leave them to themselves. Reprobation is real, but it is not symmetrical to predestination. Predestination is a positive decree to do something to

change someone's situation. Reprobation is a negative decree, to pass people over, to simply leave them to themselves.

The point is, there are all kinds of strange ideas out there about this doctrine: fear, timidity, slander, and just plain old confusion. So what does it mean that he “chose us” and that he “predestined us?” **The text is actually very clear.** As Brenz said, complaints about predestination are completely silenced by this verse (and the next). These **two parallel phrases**, one in **vs. 3** (“chose us”) and the other in **vs. 4** (“predestined us”) are both explained in their own parallel ways.



## *Before the Foundation of the World: The Covenant of Redemption*

The first gives one piece of data that isn't parallel to the second. This choosing happened “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). Let's be clear about whose choice this is. It isn't your choice for God, it is the Father “choosing us.” It is his choice. And his choice is not based upon your choice. This is the sovereign God doing something before you were ever born. And he isn't looking down through any corridors of time to see your future choice upon which he bases his choice. That nonsense isn't anywhere in this passage.

The language “before the foundation of the world” has been taken by Reformed theologians to refer to the covenant of redemption. This covenant is made between the persons of the Holy Trinity and concerns the people of God's ultimate object of affection, people he chooses for his purposes. Hodge says of this verse, “God gave a people to his Son in the covenant of redemption. Those included in that covenant ... receive in time the gift of the Holy Spirit and all other benefits of redemption.”<sup>19</sup> What this idea does is

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858), 31.

make the doctrine of **election much more personal**, for covenants are entered into only by persons. One of the problems people have a hard time understanding is the personal aspect of election. Strangely, it is fate that is impersonal, not predestination, and many people have no problem with that. Seeing that the choice resides in eternity past with members of the Godhead itself makes the choice intimate and personal.

### *Chosen for What? Holiness, Adoption, and Sonship*

Next, we learn **what he chooses them for**. Here is where the parallels begin. There are three things. First, “**that we should be holy and blameless before him**” (4). **Hodge** makes three important points I want to tell you about here.<sup>20</sup> **First**, if election is to holiness, it follows that individuals, and not communities or nations, are the objects of election. It is popular these days as in his to say that election is only corporate, but that no individuals are included in it. But groups are not holy and blameless. Individuals are. This is very personal language, not group identity postmodernism.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

**Second**, holiness in no form can be the ground of election. If men are chosen to be holy, they cannot be chosen *because* they are holy. It is a similar argument to say that we are basically good and that's why God chooses us as it is to say that God looks down the corridors of time to see our good choice of him and that's why he chooses us. The Scottish Presbyterian David Dickson (1583-1663) said, "He did not choose us because we were holy or because he foresaw that we would be holy, but he chose us without any consideration of any holiness at all in us ... He chose us as not having holiness, to the end that, being chosen, we should be made holy and should become unblameable in his sight" (Dickson, *Exposition of Ephesians*).

**Third**, "holiness is the only evidence of election. For one who lives in sin to claim to be elected unto holiness, is a contradiction." Now, people are elect that are not saved yet, but it is precisely because they are not saved that there is no evidence that they have been chosen. On the other hand, all Christians sin. But defying God, reveling in sin, insisting that the cultural seismic shifts in morality also occur in God's moral law such that he now condones what he once said he hated, this is what Hodge is talking about. You simply can't justify, celebrate, parade, promote, and applaud your sin and



dare to think that you are among the elect. Holiness and blamelessness are the marks of those who know they have been chosen.

The second and third parallels to holiness/blamelessness are found in **vs. 5**. “**He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons**.” Often this idea of corporate election is talked about in order to deny that election in deals with salvation. Supposedly, they will say, it is only election to works and service. But this says he predestined us *for adoption as sons* to himself. This is the idea of being “sons of God,” an OT concept that begins with heavenly beings, and extends to those special elect human beings, beginning with Israel in type-form (**Ex 4:22**), and being finally realized in the NT church with those who are in the covenant of redemption (**Rom 8:14-19**).

Of course, to be holy or blameless or a son through adoptions means that something has to happen to you. While he will talk much more about his later, what happens is that you are born again, you are saved, you are justified. Election always leads to this. This is a terribly important point. **Some people think** that election is God casting his vote, the devil casting his vote, and you casting the deciding vote. No. In that scenario, God’s choice doesn’t actually do

anything. But here, this spiritual blessing necessarily results in these things! There is no such thing as a person in heaven who is elect but not ultimately saved. While there are elect people down here who are not yet saved, heaven will only have those who have been changed by God. As Hodge again says, “It is the purpose of God to bring his people to holiness, sonship, and eternal glory.”<sup>21</sup>

This is why the dictionaries define the biblical doctrine of election this way, “God’s choosing of a people to enjoy the benefits of salvation and to carry out God’s purposes in the world”<sup>22</sup> or “when used in a religious sense designate the sovereign act of God in choosing from eternity some men to salvation.”<sup>23</sup>

## *Why Does God Choose?*

Some people think and teach others that God has literally **no reason** for why he chooses one person rather than another. For example, the Fundamentalist Baptist preacher **Steven Anderson** (who has received a lot of notoriety of late

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<sup>21</sup> Hodge, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, Revised and Expanded. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 100.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas J. Shepherd, *The Westminster Bible Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1880), 178.

thanks to his videos) says, “There is a false doctrine that has sprung up around this word that basically teaches that God chooses who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. That God would basically just choose a person for absolutely no reason, and just say, ‘This person is going to hell because it’s my will and there’s nothing they or anybody else can do about it.’”<sup>24</sup>

I’ve never met or known or heard of anyone who teaches that God has absolutely no reason for doing anything he does, let alone something so serious as the eternal destiny of heaven and hell. Of course, I’ve already talked about the hell part of this idiotic comment. **God doesn’t send people to hell for “no reason.”** Rather, they go to hell because they hate him, they love hating him, they do not want to bow before him, they sin and rebel and break his law and cause havoc and hatred and ruin and misery and all manner of wicked things.

But Paul addresses the other part here. It does it with two parallel ideas. **First**, election is said to be “**according to the purpose of his will**” (**Eph 1:5**). This refers to God’s sovereign will, his secret decree, his hidden counsel, his eternal

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<sup>24</sup> **Steven Anderson**, “The Bible’s Teaching on Predestination,” Faithful Word Baptist Church (Feb 21, 2016), *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REXn8eWIUXc>.

desire, his plan that only he is answerable to and only he is privy to. This is how Paul opened the letter, and he knew full well that it was not his will but God's that saved him. So also here. Of course, the "he" here is not some monad unitarian being, but the Triune God in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is in this **inscrutable relationship** that the decree of election begins. The Father chooses for the sake of the Son, that we might belong to him as a bride does to a husband. This will appear later in Ephesians 5. This, then, is a giving of the elect to the Son, as it says in John, **"My Father, who has given them to me"** (John 10:29).

This then has a **parallel**, **"to the praise of his glorious grace"** (Eph 1:6). There are two things here. First, to **the praise of God**. God chooses so that he might be praised, worshiped, adored. If he didn't, none of us here would praise him. Because he does, we can't help but do so. God wants to be praised. God must be praised, for he is the Greatest Of All Possible Things, and anything other is idolatry. The famous Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) said,

**God ... does not want the heirs of his eternal inheritance to be lazy but requires thanks and praise from them. A short**

while ago he indicated this when he said, ‘That we may be holy and blameless before him in love.’ From this it is easy to figure out what the duties of the predestined and elect children of God are. They are not to boast in the providence of God, be proud of themselves or live heedlessly and recklessly without any fear of God, but they are to make an effort to be godly, to live holy and blameless and to give thanks to God without ceasing.

(Bullinger, *Commentary on Ephesians*).

But he does **not** do it **through despotism** or **tyranny** or at the end of a **rifle barrel**. He does it according to “**grace**.” We will see later it is by grace that you have been saved (**Eph 2:5, 8**). This grace results in *salvation*. As Jesus says, “**My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand**” ... he has given the Son “**authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him**” ... and “**All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out**” (**John 10:29; 17:2; 6:37**).

This is a gracious thing to give the elect eternal life and salvation and to keep anything from snatching them away. Why? Because **no one deserves this**. What we deserve is hell,

not heaven. As rebels and aliens and enemies of God, we deserve punishment for our rebellion and sin. We do not deserve his mercy and grace. And this is precisely why it is to his praise. This is why he does it! While we may not know why he chooses any one person rather than another for this honor and blessing, we can be sure that he has his reasons, and those reasons are firmly rooted in these two truths. He wants to be praised and he wants to show his grace.

### *Love in Christ*

There is **one overarching theme** that binds all of this together both theologically and grammatically. It is the word “**love.**” “**In love he predestined us.**” Since predestination is parallel with “chosen,” it is in love that we were chosen. Love. You want the ultimate reason why God chooses you or anyone else? It is because he loved you, child. The Father loved *you*.

Some people, rightly because of **Romans 8:29**, will say that **foreknowledge** comes before predestination at least in terms of a logical ordering of decrees. However, many of those same people will want to say that what God foresaw

was our good choice of him. This contrary to the English counterpart, this is not what the Greek word means.

**Dr. Boice** argues that the OT equivalent of Paul’s “fore-knowing” is the word *yada*. It means “to know.”<sup>25</sup> It is an active knowing, a placing of love upon someone ahead of time, hence fore-knowledge. In **Deuteronomy 7:7** we read, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you...” Amos says, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” the NAS says, “You only have I chosen...” (**Amos 3:2**).

The point is, as we have seen, there is nothing to foresee in wicked people that is any good with regard to faith or choosing the Lord apart from his saving grace. There is only rebellion. Calvin says, “**How childish is the attempt to meet this argument by the following sophism! ‘We were chosen because we were worthy, and because God foresaw that we would be worthy.’ We were all lost in Adam; and therefore,**

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<sup>25</sup> **James M. Boice**, *Romans: The Reign of Grace*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 921.



had not God, through his own election, rescued us from perishing, there was nothing to be foreseen.”<sup>26</sup> That is the purpose of love here. It is God’s love that causes him to know and choose you or anyone else. It is his love *for you*. This is the covenant of redemption brought home personally to you in time and space.

What does it do to you knowing that God has loved you so much that before the world was created he set his love upon you in such a way that he would predestine you to salvation, and then (as we will see more next time), gave you every possible benefit of that salvation? There are so many unloved people. They don’t know how to love or how to receive the love of another. But God’s love is so compelling, that even when we feel unloved, he moves us through his word to understand that he does love us and that nothing is ever going to change that love. Nothing in heaven or on earth. Not a wicked person, not a demon, not a fallen angel, not yourself. Nothing is going to keep him from bringing all of this love to bear upon you in all things. And if God loves you, then you know Love and you can give it back in return.

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<sup>26</sup> John Calvin on Eph 1:4, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 198.

The catechism asks, “**What is your only comfort in life and in death.**” This is what God’s love is to do for you. It is to **comfort** you. When no one else seems to love you, God does. But you say, “**I don’t know if God loves me like that.**” Perhaps this is because you are not a Christian. To know that he does, all you need to do is **look to Christ in faith**. Turn to him for salvation and you will know. And if you have done this, then all you need to do is rest in the fact that this is what he himself tells you about how he views you. If you want to know if God loves you, believe that he says that he does and that is your proof that he does, for when you believe, then you know that you are elect! Believe him!

### *The Key: “In Christ”*

There is one final point that I want to make today, and it is something you may have noticed I have repeatedly skipped over. That famous verse in John says, “**God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.**” It is **the Son** that I have skipped over. Hodge says, “**It is the purpose of God to bring his people to holiness, sonship, and eternal glory. He never intended to do this irrespective of Christ.**”<sup>27</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Hodge, 30.

catechism question answers, “*That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul both in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.*”

What are we talking about in our text here? The phrase is “**in him**” (or its related terms; see chart). I have skipped this in order to **save it for the end**, for it is probably the most important thing said in this sentence. And it is said a lot. Who receives these blessings? **Eleven times** in this one sentence we are told that it is those who are “in him” or “in Christ,” or “in the beloved.”

## “In Christ” in Ephesians 1:3-14

Greek Text	v	literal translation	ESV
<i>en autō</i>	1:4	“in him”	“in him”
	1:9		“in Christ”
	1:10		“in him”
<i>en ō</i>	1:7	“in whom”	“in him”
	1:11		“in him”
	1:13 (x2)		“in him” (x2)
<i>en Xristō</i>	1:3	“in Christ”	“in Christ”
<i>en tō Xristō</i>	1:10	“in the Christ”	“in him”
	1:12		“in Christ”
<i>ēgapēmenō</i>	1:6	“in the beloved”	“in the Beloved”

Look only at the things we've seen today. The letter is written to the saints who are faithful "*in Christ Jesus*" (Eph 1:1). God the Father has blessed us "*in Christ*" with every spiritual blessing (3). He chose us "*in him*" before the foundation of the world (4). For his praise and because of his grace he has blessed us "*in the Beloved*" (6). All these blessings are "in him." Lloyd-Jones says it well. "If you leave out the 'in Christ' you will never have any blessings at all. This is, of course, pivotal and central in connection with the whole of our Christian faith. Every blessing we enjoy as Christian people comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>28</sup> Hodge says,

It is ... in Christ, i.e. as united to him in the covenant of redemption, that the people of God are elected to eternal life and to all the blessings therewith connected. Much in the same sense the Israelites are said to have been chosen in Abraham. Their relation to Abraham and God's covenant with him, were the ground and reason of all the peculiar blessings they enjoyed. So our covenant union with Christ is the ground of all the benefits which we as the people of God possess or hope for. We were chosen in Christ, as the Jews were chosen in Abraham.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Hodge, 31.

“There is no doubt but that in that expression the Apostle has in mind the contrast we have already seen in the way in which he describes God as ‘The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ rather than as ‘The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.’ Paul reminds us that as the covenant and the representative are different so the blessings are also different.”<sup>30</sup> This makes your blessings infinitely greater than theirs, for their federal head was a sinful man and their blessings were, as a nation, earthly blessings. But ours are every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Calvin says that being “in Christ” is,

Proof that the election is free; for if we are chosen *in Christ*, it is *not of ourselves*. It is not from a perception of anything that we deserve, but because our heavenly Father has introduced us, through the privilege of adoption, into the body of Christ. In short, the name of Christ excludes all merit, and everything which men have of their own; for when he says that we are *chosen in Christ*, it follows that in ourselves we are unworthy.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 63.

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, 198.

Don't be like so many who hate this doctrine, who misteach it, or who misunderstand it. Even [Erasmus](#), to whom Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will* got this,

Lest anyone should ask how such a wonderful blessing has come about, Paul says that it was resolutely determined through the goodness of God, by an eternal decree made before the foundation of the world. It was then that he chose us so that our sinful life might be wiped away by his Son, through whom he created, governs and will restore all things.

([Erasmus](#), *Paraphrases*).

I know of nothing more precious in all the world than the truth that the Heavenly Father has chosen me before the foundation of the world to be his son through adoption that I might be holy and blameless in his sight. Because if this is true, there is nothing in all the world that separate me from his love. For that love did not depend upon me but him. And therefore, since he is unchangeable, there is nothing in all the world that will be able to separate me from the love of God the Father through Jesus Christ the Lord.

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