

RCC in the Word

Week of February 4

Ephesians 1.4

One of my favorite parts of our annual men's retreat to the Nine Marks Conference is the time of fellowship with my brothers in Christ. Part of our tradition on the van ride is to share our testimonies. As you can imagine, the stories are as diverse as the number of men on the trip. As the men share, I find myself amazed at the grace of God; surprised at the various ways and means God providentially used to bring the glorious gospel of Christ to lost sinners. Each testimony is unique and personal. At the same time, every single story shares a common thread. It is the thread that connects and intertwines the testimony of all the saints - the unconditional election of God.

In Ephesians 1.3-14, Paul, in one-long Greek sentence, praises God for his sovereign work in salvation. **He chose us in him** (vs4). **He predestined us** (vs5). **Having been predestined** (vs11). As Paul begins his letter to the church in Ephesus, his heart and mind are consumed with lofty thoughts and meditations on the greatness and grandeur of God. The Apostle recognizes that all the spiritual blessings the saints have in Christ - forgiveness of sins, adoption as sons, holiness, a future inheritance - are grounded in the truth that God elected to save a people to the praise of his glorious grace. Apart from God's sovereign selection of sinners, none of these blessings would be possible. The root and ground and foundation of salvation and all the blessings that flow from our union with Christ are based on God's decision to redeem a people for himself.

In election, God saves whomever he is pleased to save on the basis of his grace and according to his eternal purposes. Notice Paul's words in verse 4. **He chose us**. The Greek word translated "chose" means to select or pick for oneself. Some view God like a team captain choosing the best for his team. I remember in PE, the captain chose those who had the greatest skills, the biggest muscles. She chose players who added something to the team. (Obviously, I was usually one of the last to be picked for the team!) Some argue that God chose his "team," on the basis of some sort of value or worth or merit in in the "players." Others contend that in his foreknowledge, God saw who would choose Christ. On the basis of their future faith decision, God chose them. In these views, election is not unconditional. Rather, God elects based on some condition in us. However, when Paul writes that God **chose us**, he recognizes that God's choice was entirely independent of any future decision we would make to follow or Christ. Likewise, God's choice was entirely independent of anything good he saw in us. God's election was unconditional or sovereign. As RC Sproul writes, "The Reformed view of election, known as unconditional election, means that God does not foresee an action or condition on our part that induces Him to save us. Rather, election rests on God's sovereign decision to save whomever He is pleased to save."

We find evidence of sovereign election from Paul's words in verse four. **God chose us in him**. God chose us in Christ. In his commentary on this passage, John Calvin writes, "If we are chosen in Christ, it is not of ourselves.... 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." God could not choose us in ourselves for there was nothing worthy in us. In our sins, we were under the wrath of God, at enmity with God. And being dead in our sins and trespasses, there was nothing we could do to remedy our situation. So, God elected us in Christ - in Christ's perfect life that fulfilled all righteousness, in Christ's atoning death that took away our sins and removed God's wrath, in Christ's resurrection that

justified us and raised us from the dead. Charles Spurgeon put it this way, "God called us in Christ. He justified us in Christ. He sanctified us in Christ. He will perfect us in Christ. He will glorify us in Christ. We have everything in Christ, and we have nothing apart from Christ." **He chose us in Him!**

The second proof of unconditional election is based on the time when God chose us. **God chose us in him before the foundation of the world.** Before God created us, he chose to save us! This certainly excludes all boasting on our part. We did not even exist, yet, God said, "I choose him. I choose her." This also means that God knew his creation would disastrously and pridefully rebel against him. He knew the people created in his image would reject his wise and loving rule over their lives. He knew that our willful sin would be met with his righteous justice and deserve his eternal wrath. And, God knew that once Adam ate the forbidden fruit sin would come into the world through one man, and death through sin so death spread to all men (Rom5.12). Do you see anything good in us here? Do you see any reason God should choose us? However, God with full and complete and infallible knowledge having ordained all that would come to pass, made the sovereign decision to save those whom he chose. And, he did this before the foundation of the world!

For Paul, the doctrine of unconditional election is the fountain from which his passionate praise flows. **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** (vs3). And what is the first, the primary blessing? **He chose us!** Unconditional election guarantees our salvation in Christ for now and eternity. Unconditional election reveals the deep love of God for his children. Unconditional election secures our inheritance. Unconditional election engages all our spiritual blessings in Christ. Unconditional election compels us to sing. *To the praise of your glory, to the praise of his mercy and grace. To the praise of your glory. You are the God who saves!* (To the Praise of Your Glory, Sovereign Grace Music)

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