

ELECTION, FREE-WILL, & GRACE TRUTH

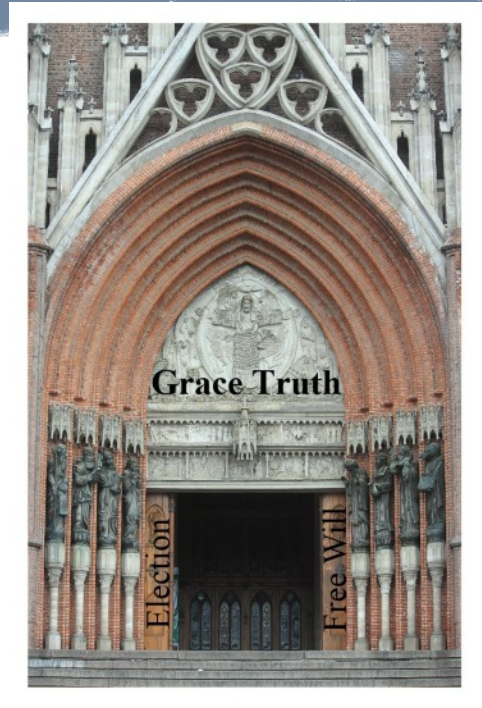
PART 1

EXPLORING THE TRUTH OF YOUR SALVATION

*“Just as He chose us in Him
before the foundation of the
world, that we should be holy
and without blame before
Him in love, ...”
Eph. 1:4 NKJV*

INTRODUCTION

Every believer in Jesus Christ comes to this important question at some time in her or his life: "How did I really become a Christian?" We wonder, "Did God choose me to be a Christian, or did I choose to be one by my own free-will?" The Bible is used to support both of these views (election and free-will). However, Scripture does not contradict itself, so they both cannot be correct. We will look at some key verses to determine what the Bible really teaches on this topic.



Since the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (some 500 years ago), considerable debate has centered on whether God chooses certain individuals to be saved or if He allows each person to make his or her own choice (free-will). Respected theologians have supported both sides, and the debate goes on and on, with each side convinced it is right. A person with an objective mind cannot help but wonder if the disagreement primarily lies in how we interpret Bible verses.

Christians want to make sure our views are based upon a solid understanding of the Word. We also want to make sure we are not missing something, which prevents a correct understanding. *Grace 4 You* Adult Studies 1-3 will address the topic of how a person becomes a Christian, and show there is a generally missing third viewpoint. That third view relates to "the plan and purpose of God" for the Age of Grace in which we live. The verses that relate to this topic can be seen with new eyes, and this view helps us gain a much clearer understanding.

Your thoughts: If God has already chosen certain people to be saved, how do you know if you are one of the chosen ones? Do we have any say in this matter?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The whole matter of election and free-will can be confusing, so we will try to help with the terms used. The words *elect*, *elected*, and *election* occur some 27 times in the Bible (depending on your translation), but the same Hebrew and Greek words are translated even more often as *choose*, *chose*, and *chosen*. Thus, the root words in the original languages for *elect* and *chose* are the same. The translators used the word they thought best.

The two major views on this topic came from John Calvin (1509-1564 A.D., a French theologian) and Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609 A.D., a Dutch theologian). Calvin promoted the belief that God chose each believer and then gave the person faith so he or she could believe. (This view is referred to as Calvinism.) Arminius promoted the belief that each person has a free-choice in whether he or she will believe. (This is the Arminian view.) The difference between the two is like night and day. Major church denominations and various

groups have developed in large part because of these two beliefs. People have been persecuted for their beliefs; many people have been pressured to believe a certain way in order to be accepted by a particular church or group.

Calvinists believe God pre-determined, before creation, that He would give faith to certain people so they could believe and then be saved. There is an extreme Calvinistic view, which holds that God predetermined before creation to save certain people and then gives them faith after they are born so they will believe. These two views are based upon the belief that God has foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29). Foreknowledge means He knows what will happen ahead of time; thus, God gives faith to those He knows will believe. It all gets very confusing, but we will present an understandable, scripturally sound position as we continue in these lessons.

EXPOSING PROBLEMS

An important biblical passage related to this topic is Romans 8:29. This verse has been misunderstood for too long; we trust to teach the real meaning.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

The word *predestined* means to choose beforehand, or to predetermine something ahead of time. For example, if family members decide to have a reunion every year on the first Sunday in June, they have predestined that reunion, that is, they have chosen beforehand when it will be held. *Predestined* means that God determined to do something ahead of the actual event. We dare not jump to the conclusion God predestined certain people to become Christians when they were born later.

Your Thoughts: Does the verse above indicate God predestined certain people to salvation?

Deep down inside, in your heart of hearts, you have an inner sense that makes you wonder if God would really choose certain people to be saved. If He chooses some, that would mean He rejects others, condemning them to Hell. That concept certainly does not seem like a fair and just God. At *Grace 4 You Ministries*, we believe the Holy Spirit gives each of us the wisdom (from the Word) to know that cannot be how God works. Consider these verses:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16).

"For *'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'*" (Rom. 10:13).

"...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pt. 3:9b).

"...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

In the first two verses the word "whoever" gives strong evidence that the salvation of individuals was not settled before creation. Clearly these verses say, "whoever believes in Christ" can be saved, so this implies we have a choice to believe or not. Then, the last two verses indicate God does not want any to perish but for all to be saved; well, how can that be true if He specifically chooses certain people? If God chooses to deny some individuals faith, how can a fair and just God condemn people for not believing?

BIBLE TRUTH

As mentioned previously, the topic of election and free-will cannot be understood properly from just two viewpoints. Considering just two views (election and free-will) is like thinking one can fully understand the Godhead by studying the Father and the Holy Spirit, while omitting Jesus Christ. The third critical view relates to the overall plan and purpose of God for the Age of Grace. We will see that God did not choose certain individuals for salvation, but He predetermined *how* people would be saved in our Age, and for *what* purpose.

Some people believe God chose certain people to be saved before creation, based upon the fact He knew ahead of time (foreknowledge) who would believe by their own free choice. Why would He have to choose them if they would believe anyway? It is like saying we will choose certain people to be Americans if they are born in America; however, there is no reason to chose because they will be Americans naturally. The issue of God's choosing people before they are born comes from passages like Eph. 1:4, "...**just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.**" This verse is mistaken to mean God chooses (elects) each believer, and He did it before the foundation of the world.

The mistaken belief concerning election is based upon just a small, incomplete phrase in Ephesians 1:4, while the entire verse teaches something completely different. The incomplete phrase is "**He chose us.**" Using an incomplete phrase results in an equally incomplete understanding. The fuller phrase is "**He chose us in Him.**" The difference is subtle, but the more complete phrase indicates God chose how He would accept us, that is, He chose the *plan of salvation* before creation. His chosen plan of salvation is based upon being in Christ. The emphasis is not on us but on the Savior.

Christ is the main idea of this verse; to be saved we must be *in Him*. The Apostle Paul refers to being "in Christ" so often, it is hard to see how people miss this point. Six verses, many in the immediate context of Ephesians 1:4, are shown below, with our verse in bold. These verses indicate how Paul uses the term "in Christ" as a way of showing a relationship with Christ that is new and special in the Age of Grace.

1. "...blessed us with every spiritual blessing ... in Christ" (Eph. 1:3)
2. "**He chose us in Him...**" (Eph. 1:4)
3. "...made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)
4. "In Him we have redemption..." (Eph. 1:7)
5. "...gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10)
6. "In Him also we have obtained an inheritance" (Eph. 1:11)

Ephesians 1:4 is not teaching anything about *who* was chosen, it is teaching *how* a person can be saved. This verse is in the midst of many verses explaining the blessings we have today by being in Christ. God chose a plan of salvation, which is that we must be in Christ. Considering the entire verse, as we should, we learn that God establish a plan before creation and that plan had a purpose. The purpose of the plan of salvation was that we could become holy and blameless before God, based upon His love.

Your Thoughts: Is it good news to you that God predestined *how* people can be saved?

We can also see this third viewpoint in Romans 8:29, **"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."** This verse is teaching His purpose in saving us, that is, so we can be conformed to the image of His Son. Based upon His foreknowledge, God predetermined that each believer would be conformed to the image of His Son (made to be like Him). God wanted each believer to have the character and attributes of Christ, qualities that are achieved by being in Him. Since the believer is in Christ, he or she will be resurrected for a life in Heaven, just as He was the first to be resurrected. It boils down to this: the predetermined plan of God was to call (invite) every person to be saved, and those who heed the call would be justified and glorified (Rom. 8:30).

God planned from the beginning to provide a means of salvation for mankind, who He knew would sin. In the Age of Grace, that plan requires us to be in Christ, so we can be conformed to the image of His Son. God's whole purpose is to save us and bless us. There is no choosing of certain people, but choosing a plan and purpose.

We can gain perspective on this whole manner by examining the historic relationship between God and humans. For thousands of years, we humans had an

exalted opinion of ourselves. We considered ourselves important because our planet was the center of everything and because Christ came here to die. Then scientists, like Copernicus, discovered the sun was the center of our solar system, the planets revolved around the sun, and a much larger universe existed beyond the solar system.... These discoveries meant our planet and solar system were not the center of anything. It also meant the earth moved; believers used Bible verse to show (mistakenly) the earth cannot move. Many Christians feared the Bible was under attack as the truth of the vastness of space and time challenged their interpretations of the Bible.

The reformers lived at a time when science was overturning long-held beliefs. The reformers were often out of touch with science, and they were just beginning to learn the truth for our Age. As an example of being out of touch with science, Luther is quoted as saying of Copernicus, "This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy, but sacred Scripture tells us...." John Wesley said that the Copernican system "tends to infidelity." The Roman Catholic Church found such beliefs worthy of death. We would have held similar beliefs if we were alive then, so we must respect their perspectives for that time in history.

Your Thoughts: Was the Bible under attack by these scientific discoveries, or were interpretations of the Bible challenged by facts?

We must be willing to go beyond the beliefs of the reformers (Calvin, Luther, Arminius, Zwingli, et. al.), as we explore the Word of God. The reformers made great advances in the understanding of Scripture; however, they were just beginning to understand the mystery (Eph. 3:2-6; Col. 1:26; Rom. 16:25). They did not fully realize how the Age of Grace worked into God's eternal purpose for mankind. The concept of God choosing the plan of salvation may have eluded them.

Note: If you have gotten this far and are not convinced of what has been written, please be sure to read Adult Studies 2-3.

TAKE TO HEART

Summary

The two common beliefs on how each person becomes a believer are (1) being chosen by God and (2) making a free-will decision to believe. Many verses are used to support each view, but upon analysis it is clear that small phrases are taken out of context to make incorrect conclusions. When we look at the entire verses, not just small phrases, we see that God did choose something before the world began, but He was not choosing certain people. God chose the way of salvation, that is, the plan for salvation for our Age. He chose the way by which every person could be saved. The plan is simple, each person must be "in Christ" to be saved.

Gospel

"...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4). God's chosen plan for salvation is simple: a person must be in Christ.

Each of us can be "in Christ" by having faith in Him as savior. The believer is made one with Christ and made holy and without blame. This is all according to God's purpose to save and bless each of us in Christ.

Encouragement

The topic of election, free-will, and grace truth is hard to understand; do not be discouraged if you do not seem to get it. The next lesson provides a simple analogy that is very helpful in understanding this topic. The object of your faith is Jesus Christ. He will help you know the truth of the Bible. May you be encouraged in your faith and desire to learn the Word of God. God knows your heart and will bless you in ways you never thought possible. Praise the Lord for your faith in Him.