

Chosen by Grace, Called to Believe

Text: Ephesians 1:11–14

Main Point: God sovereignly chooses and saves His people, and those He saves truly respond to the gospel through repentance and faith.

Note for the group: This discussion is not to debate Calvinism vs. Arminianism. Though systematic doctrines can be helpful in understanding complex theologies, our time in this group does not allow for us to explore all the complexities of these doctrines. The following conversation however does present a biblical theology of free will, election, and God's sovereignty. All of these are biblical concepts and must be held with some tension. We will not be able to fully grasp or understand the way God works with our finite minds. God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. Our goal here is to read what God has revealed about himself, and then believe it.

Opening Discussion

- When people talk about “free will,” what do they usually mean?
- Why can God's sovereignty and human responsibility feel difficult to reconcile?

Read Ephesians 1:11–14

Ask: What actions are described in this passage?

- God predestines according to His purpose.
- The gospel is proclaimed and heard.
- People believe in Christ.
- The Holy Spirit seals those who believe.
- God receives the praise and glory.

1. Salvation Begins with God's Sovereign Choice

Read: Ephesians 1:4–7, 11–12

God's saving work began before we ever sought Him. The Bible repeatedly describes the elect as those whom he has chosen.

- God chose His people before the foundation of the world.
- He predestined them for adoption and conformity to Christ.
- Christ accomplished their redemption through His blood.
- God works everything according to the counsel of His will.

- The ultimate purpose of salvation is the praise of God's glory.

Election means that salvation rests upon God's gracious purpose rather than human merit, effort, or wisdom.

Discussion

1. According to Ephesians 1:11, what is the basis of God's decision to save?
2. What are the elect predestined for according to Ephesians 1:4–5?
3. How does election remove our ability to boast about salvation?
4. How does knowing that God chose His people before creation affect the way you understand His love?

Key Takeaway: Salvation begins with God's purpose, is accomplished through Christ's work, and results in God's glory.

2. God's People Willingly Respond to the Gospel

Read: Ephesians 1:13; John 6:37, 44; Mark 1:15; Romans 10:13–17

Ephesians 1 holds God's sovereignty and human responsibility together. God predestines, but people must still hear the gospel and believe in Christ.

Scripture does not describe fallen humanity as spiritually neutral. We make real and willing choices, but sin has corrupted what we desire.

- Everyone who practices sin is enslaved to sin (John 8:34).
- The natural mind does not submit to God and cannot please Him (Romans 8:7–8).
- No one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44).
- Everyone the Father gives to Christ will come willingly to Him (John 6:37).

God's grace brings sinners to Christ through the proclamation of the gospel.

Discussion

1. What human actions do you see in Ephesians 1:13?
2. What human actions do you see in Romans 10:13–17?
3. How would you respond to someone who says, "If God has already chosen the elect, then my choices do not matter"?
4. Why does election give us confidence to share the gospel?

God ordains both the result and the means He uses to accomplish it. He saves His people through gospel proclamation, hearing, repentance, and faith.

John Calvin makes this same point concerning God's providence:

“If he offers helps to us, [our duty is] to use them; if he forewarns us of dangers, not to plunge headlong; if he makes remedies available, not to neglect them.”

God’s sovereignty gives us every reason to act faithfully. We proclaim the gospel because “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Key Takeaway: God’s sovereign choice and our responsibility to repent, believe, and proclaim the gospel stand together.

3. Election Produces Assurance, Holiness, and Hope

Read: Ephesians 1:13–14; 1 Peter 1:1–5; John 10:27–29

Belief does not earn salvation. Christ earned redemption, and faith receives what Christ accomplished.

“Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Those who believe are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the guarantee that God will complete His saving work.

- God chose His people to be holy and blameless.
- The Spirit sanctifies them for obedience.
- God guards them through faith.
- Christ promises that no one will snatch them from His hand.
- Those God justifies will ultimately be glorified.

Election gives believers assurance while also calling them toward holiness. The grace that saves us also transforms and preserves us.

Discussion

1. What does it mean to be sealed with the Holy Spirit?
2. Where should our assurance of salvation be placed?
3. If good works do not earn salvation, why should Christians pursue holiness?
4. How does God’s promise to preserve His people encourage you during seasons of weakness?
5. What evidence of God’s transforming grace should be visible in the life of someone who has been saved?

Key Takeaway: The God who chooses His people also redeems, sanctifies, preserves, and glorifies them.

Closing Summary

The process of salvation revealed in Scripture can be summarized this way:

1. The Father chooses His people according to His gracious purpose.
2. The Son accomplishes their redemption through His death and resurrection.
3. The gospel is proclaimed.
4. God calls sinners through the gospel.
5. They willingly repent and believe in Christ.
6. God justifies and seals them with His Spirit.
7. God sanctifies and preserves them through faith.
8. God will glorify them with Christ.

Election gives no room for pride, passivity, or presumption. It produces humility, worship, evangelism, obedience, assurance, and hope.

Missional Moment

Read Romans 10:13–17 and 2 Timothy 2:10.

- Who in your life needs to hear the gospel?
- What opportunity could you create this week to speak with them?
- How does believing in God's sovereign power give you courage to share Christ?

Choose one or two people and pray that God would open their hearts, give you an opportunity to speak, and bring them willingly to repentance and faith.

Closing Prayer

Praise God for choosing, redeeming, calling, and preserving His people. Thank Him that salvation rests entirely upon Christ's finished work. Ask for greater assurance, deeper holiness, and boldness to proclaim the gospel to everyone.