

Running head: CORPORATE ELECTION

Ephesians 1:3-4: An Explanation of the Corporate  
and Christocentric Nature of Election

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Abstract

Controversy and debate have raged over the nature of election, and perhaps the weightiest passage on the subject is found in Ephesians 1. This thesis will provide an extensive exegesis of Ephesians 1:3-4 in particular while looking at its broader context within the epistle in general. With Ephesians 1:3-4 as its central focus, this thesis will demonstrate the following: Election is unconditional and it is corporate in Christ. Although an individual's salvation was certainly known by God in eternity past, individuals were not chosen by God to this salvation. The unconditionally elect One is Jesus Christ, and individuals are elected to salvation upon belief in Christ as they become a part of the corporate body of Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-4: An Explanation of the Corporate and Christocentric Nature of  
Election

**Corporate Election in Ephesians 1:3-4**

Ephesians 1:3-4 is, without a doubt, a hotly debated passage on the issue of election. It has long been the claim of the Calvinistic school of thought that verses 3-4 refer to the individual unconditional election of Christian believers.<sup>1</sup> It is inferred that God made a pre-temporal choice of particular individuals to be saved based solely on His good pleasure without their meeting any condition of salvation whatsoever (i.e. choice to believe in Christ). From this inference, there is then no room for the possibility of an individual having genuine choice in the salvation of his soul. Thus, the idea that God saves someone based on the condition of his belief in Christ is contradicted by this Calvinistic view.

Of course, the view of unconditional election will never do for those who disagree with the theology of Calvinism, and it certainly will not sit well with Arminians who affirm genuine human choice in salvation as well as conditional security (i.e., God saves when man chooses to repent and believe and his glorification is contingent upon his endurance in the faith).<sup>2</sup> There have generally been two ways that Arminians have dealt with passages like Ephesians 1:3-4 that seem so clearly to speak of a pre-temporal

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<sup>1</sup> For an in depth exegesis of Ephesians 1:3-4 from the Calvinistic standpoint, see Crawford's article for *The Master's Seminary Journal*. (Leslie James Crawford, "Ephesians 1:3-4 and the Nature of Election," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, vol. 11 no. 1 [Spring 2000]: 75-91).

<sup>2</sup> An excellent presentation of the true Arminian perspective on free will can be found in Roger Olson's chapter "Myth 4: The Heart of Arminianism Is Belief in Free Will" from his book *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. (Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 97-114).

election. First, classical Arminians have claimed that God does elect, or choose, believers pre-temporally based on His foreknowledge of our choice to repent and believe.<sup>3</sup> With this view, God is seen as having a passive knowledge of our future belief. Many Calvinists have had strong objections to this view based on the idea that God's foreknowledge should be seen as a more active process in which God chooses to know us in intimate relationship.<sup>4</sup> However, other Arminians have chosen a different line of argumentation against the classical Calvinistic understanding. They posit that the election of Ephesians 1:3-4 concerns the election of a corporate body of believers in Christ. It is not an election of the individual, but rather a choice of a body that all those who will trust in Jesus Christ for salvation can be a part of. With this view, Christ is presented as the foundation of the election of the church in Ephesians 1:3-4, and as the object election in 1 Peter 2:6. As the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), Christ's election includes the election of his body. Thus, there is a strong connection between the election of the church and Christ's election.<sup>5</sup>

The latter position will be defended and argued for in this paper. Taking Ephesians 1:3-4 as our starting point, corporate election can be demonstrated as the correct understanding of the passage through the following means: 1) First, special attention will be given to the corporate, ecclesiastical language present in these verses

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Cottrell presents his prescience-based predestination view as "classical Arminianism." For a full explanation of this view see his chapter in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*. (Jack W. Cottrell, *Perspectives on Election: Five Views* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006], 70-134).

<sup>4</sup> An appeal could be made to 1 Peter 1:20 where Christ is seen as foreknown (προεγνωσμένου) from the foundation of the world. Certainly God's passive foreknowledge could not be the intention here. He knew His Son in a loving, intimate relationship.

<sup>5</sup> Proponents of this view have included Robert Shank, Ben Witherington, William Klein, Roger T. Forster, Paul Marston, Joseph Dongell, Jerry Walls, and Clark Pinnock.

(i.e. what it means to be ἐν Χριστῷ) as well as its use throughout the epistle.<sup>6</sup> 2) Then, by a proper understanding of the phrase from verse 4, “he chose us in him (ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ) . . .,”<sup>7</sup> we can demonstrate that this refers to the pre-temporal election of Christ, not individuals. “Us (ἡμᾶς)” in this verse refers to the corporate body, and we will find this same corporate language as we compare other Scriptures on election, where the only individual referred to in election is Christ (1 Peter 2:4-9). 3) Third, we will find corporate election to be true because the doctrine of apostasy, from the Arminian understanding, is true. This facet of the argument stems from Ephesians 1:4, and it can be demonstrated that the destiny of God’s corporate elect, to be “holy and without blame (ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους)” in the end is only certain for the corporate body and not for the individual.

### **In Christ**

It should first be noted that it is neither the corporate language of Ephesians nor the use of plural pronouns in verses 3-4 that demonstrate corporate election to be the accurate view in interpreting the passage. However, Paul’s use of this language is necessary to his point. Notice that our election, including the spiritual blessings that stem from this election, is Christocentric.<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is realized and centered in Christ. Further, it should be noted that each time we read of our being “in Christ” in Ephesians, the idea is always described with plural pronouns. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians focuses

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ephesians 1:6, 7, 11, 13; 2:6, 13; 3:12.

<sup>7</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Berkouwer writes extensively about “election in Christ” in his *Divine Election*. Here, he argues that Christ is all in all in election. Rather than being merely the *means* by which an already established decree would be carried out, election was in Him from the beginning and carried out through Him in time. (G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960], 132-71).

on the church as one body with Christ as its head. This emphasis is especially realized as we look to passages such as Ephesians 2:11-22 where the church is being described as “a holy temple in the Lord” that is “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (vv. 21-22). Again, the corporate body of believers is “to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body” is being built up “in love” (4:15-16). Thus, when Paul uses plural pronouns like “us” and “we,” he is referring to the universal church, the corporate body of Christ. In this section we will answer two important questions: 1) Is the election of individuals ever specifically mentioned in Ephesians? And 2) is a pre-temporal individual election consistent with the rest of New Testament theology?

**Is individual election mentioned specifically in Ephesians?** We will now look to several examples where we find this pairing of plural pronouns with our blessings in Christ. Notice in 1:6 we have been given God’s grace, “with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.” Based on the following verse that is rendered, “In him we have redemption through his blood . . .,” there is little doubt that “the Beloved” is in reference to Christ. Both verses 6 and 7 reveal to us the Christocentric and corporate nature of God’s gifts of grace and redemption. Of course, they are realized temporally in the lives of individuals upon their faith in Christ, but here, they refer to the plan and purpose of salvation that was “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time” (vv. 9-10).

Again, in verses 11-14, the same kind of imagery is seen with regard to our inheritance. Because of our inclusion in the corporate body of Christ, we have obtained this wonderful inheritance, as well as the seal of the Holy Spirit who is the “guarantee of our inheritance” (1:14). Notice in these verses that it was not God’s personal choice of

individuals that guarantees us anything. It is only identification with Christ through faith that brings about such an assurance of salvation. Through belief, one is included in the corporate elect (Ephesians 1:3-4). With the corporate elect being the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), His election (1 Pet. 2:6) essentially was the election of the church. Thus, Paul's reference to the corporate elect "in Christ" cannot be separated from the election of Christ Himself.

Ephesians 2:6-7 demonstrates that Paul's emphasis is on the corporate elect in Christ. The church is seen as seated in Christ in the heavenly places. Those of us who have been saved through faith in Christ, despite our physical position in life, can be confident that our spiritual position is seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father. This can only be possible if the apostle has the corporate body of Christ in view. As Christ's body we are positioned with Him. Christ has held this position in Heaven ever since He ascended from earth back to His father.<sup>9</sup> Individuals, on the other hand, only experience this position in Christ upon belief. The "immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us" are available for all who choose to be "in Christ Jesus" (v.7). Thus, the corporate elect body has always been seated in heaven in Christ, but what these verses certainly do not tell us is that each believing individual has always been there.

In 3:11, the apostle references God's "eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." Few would disagree that election is Christocentric, and that fact is especially highlighted in this verse. Notice in verse 12 that, ". . . we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him." We do not base our confidence on a pre-temporal election in which we were chosen before Christ died for our sins. Rather,

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Acts 2:34; Heb. 1:3



our confidence is based on a central truth—Jesus Christ and Him crucified!<sup>10</sup> A similar expression is found in 2 Timothy 1:9 in reference to God, “. . . who saved us and called us to a holy calling . . . because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” God’s purpose was in Christ pre-temporally, but notice in neither the Ephesians passage nor 2 Timothy do we find that some individuals were chosen to salvation. Certainly, as we are now a part of the corporate elect, in retrospect, this purpose of God was for “us,” but we cannot conclude that the “us” in this passage was a predetermined set of elect individuals. However, we do know that God set out His purpose in Christ “before the ages began” for all those who are now a part of the church.

Second Timothy 1:10 explains how this purpose of God, salvation through Christ, has been “manifested through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ” in time. With His appearing, Jesus “abolished death.” He did not abolish it for us in eternity past, but it was in His cross that He triumphed over death (Col. 2:13-15). If individuals, not yet in existence, were already placed in Christ pre-temporally with all the benefits and blessings of salvation (Ephesian 1:3) held securely, destined for eternal life, then what of the redemptive work of Christ in the first century A.D.? How could any of the blessings of salvation be effectual for us before the finished work of Christ? To claim this would seem to make the redemptive mission of Christ a “divine pageantry,” a mere symbol of what God has already completed in eternity past.<sup>11</sup> It would be more consistent with

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<sup>10</sup> “Christ is belittled if we think that God first forgave and redeemed us and *then* put us in Christ; we should rather believe that it is only *in Christ* that we have received redemption and forgiveness. Christ is also belittled if we think that God first chose us and then put us in Christ; it is rather that those in Christ share in his election, and so are chosen in him.” (Roger T. Forster and Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1973], 132).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Shank asks, “Was the redemptive career of Jesus in *time* actually decisive, or instead merely symbolic—only a temporal exhibit, the design of which was to reflect and delineate the dimensions of an election (and reprobation) already accomplished by fiat of God in the counsels of eternity?” If this were true he states, “Thus Christ’s ‘redemptive’ career—the incarnation, His death and resurrection, His

Scripture, which clearly views the cross as necessary to our salvation, to hold that the eternal purpose of God was that salvation would come through Christ, not that certain individuals were elected pre-temporally.

### **Is a Pre-Temporal Individual Election Consistent with New Testament**

**Theology?** The necessity of the redemptive career of Christ should be enough for us to understand that the salvation and election of individuals did not occur pre-temporally but, rather, it occurs in time as one places his faith in Jesus Christ. However, there is another facet of New Testament theology that serves to demonstrate that the election of Ephesians 1:3-4 is corporate. We must notice again the concept of our election. When it comes to the testimony of the rest of New Testament, the fact of one being in Christ carries with it explicit benefits. The phrase is always seen as salvific encompassing all of the benefits that belong to us through faith in Christ.

A brief survey of Paul's theology of "in Christ" from his epistle to the Romans demonstrates this point. Our justification is realized "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (1:1). In Christ, we are "free . . . from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). If Christ is in us, which is equated with our being in Him (John 14:20-21), we have life in the Spirit (Romans 8:10). We are beneficiaries of "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:39). The message is clear: To be in Christ is to have salvation.

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ascension and intercession—are seen as incidental and symbolic . . ." He answers this view, "The real instrumentality of Christ in the election derives from the necessity of His ministry of mediation between God and man." (Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1970], 32-33). A Calvinist may object that election is God choosing us to be saved through Christ's work, not that we are actually saved by election. But this is inconsistent with a Calvinistic interpretation of Ephesians 1. We were chosen "in Christ." It is "in Christ" that we have "every spiritual blessing" including salvation. Thus, from a Calvinistic perspective, salvation was ours in Christ long before His redemptive career. So we must ask again, what of His redemptive work? Was it only intended to demonstrate what was already accomplished before the ages began?

So why does this present a problem for a view that asserts pre-temporal, individual election? This interpretation is problematic because pre-temporal election, as it is delineated in Ephesians 1:3-4 is “in Christ.” As pointed out above, all of the benefits of salvation are “in Christ.” One such benefit would be the fact that there is “no condemnation.” For Calvinistic theology to remain consistent with its interpretation of Ephesians 1:3-4, it would have to conclude that individuals elected to salvation were delivered from condemnation the moment they were elected “in Christ” in eternity past. Besides the fact that it is absurd for someone to be delivered from condemnation before they enter into it, this concept is also unscriptural. John 3:18, 36 makes clear for us that those who presently do not believe are also presently under condemnation. Calvinists would agree that all those who have not believed in Christ are in such a state, but, again, they do so inconsistently with their theology. For in their interpretive framework, individuals were elected in Christ even before they believed. It is logically impossible for someone to be “in Christ” and under condemnation at the same time (Rom. 8:1).

The description of Adronicus and Junia, given to us by the Apostle in Romans 16:7, is quite pertinent to the issue of pre-temporal, individual election. Paul states that they were “in Christ” before he was. The plain meaning of the text is, of course, that their conversion happened before Paul’s chronologically. But Paul used the specific phrase ἐν Χριστῷ. If Ephesians 1:3-4 were speaking of individual election rather than corporate election, we would have a contradiction here. Election in Christ happened before time. Therefore, if individuals were elected in Christ before time, any statement, like the one we have in Romans 16:7, about one individual being “in Christ” before another individual would be meaningless. However, if we understand that one is “in

Christ” only upon his conversion, not in a pre-temporal decree of God, then Paul’s statement here would make perfect sense. Thus, we should confidently be able to rule out the interpretation of individual election in Christ in Ephesians 1:3-4.

### **The Election of Christ**

In Ephesians, we have seen the election of a body and a plan. The body is the Church, and the plan is salvation through Jesus Christ. This election was a pre-temporal election but we never see this election as inclusive of certain individuals while exclusive of others. In this section, the pre-temporal election will be demonstrated as encompassed in one election—the election of Christ. In Christ, we find the fulfillment of not only the plan of salvation, but the object of salvation which is the church. The Scriptures point to God planning a destiny for the body of the Elect One without determining who would and would not have access by faith to the incorporation of that body. Below, Christ’s election with relation to His elect body will be compared with that of the election of Israel and its relation to those within the nation. We’ll see that Christ’s election is the only pre-temporal election of an individual specifically mentioned in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

**Israel and Messiah, chosen of God.** Just as Israel as a nation was the elect of God in the Old Testament, Christ is the corporate elect in the New Testament. A comparison of the two concepts will aid us in understanding our election as New Testament believers. In Isaiah 41:8-9, God says of Israel “my servant, Jacob, whom I

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<sup>12</sup> Dongell and Walls explain this concept relating Christ’s election to that of believers: “It is in him that we have been chosen and predestined (Eph 1:4-5), just as it is in him that we have been seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6-7). This means that Jesus Christ himself is the chosen one, the predestined one. Whenever one is incorporated into him by grace through faith, one comes to share in Jesus’ special status as chosen of God.” (Joseph Dongell and Jerry L. Walls, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 76).

have chosen . . . I have chosen you and not cast you off.” The election of this nation as the “offspring of Abraham” is pictured here as corporate in its scope relating back to an individual as its basis—God’s choice of Abraham (Nehemiah 9:7). Now notice Isaiah 42:1 in reference to the Messiah, God says, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” The descriptions of the elect Messiah (individual) and the elect Israel (corporate) are both as God’s “servant.” In the New Testament, it becomes clearer to us that Israel’s election prefigures Christ, but here we see this truth implicit in the aforementioned passages.

The Church is described as the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16.<sup>13</sup> As national Israel was elect in their relation to Abraham, the Church also becomes recipients of the promise of Abraham through Jesus Christ (3:14). The covenant made with Abraham was actually confirmed in Christ, who is the seed of Abraham (3:16-17), and all those who are in Christ have now become Abraham’s seed (3:29). This teaching from Galatians tells us much about the corporate nature of election. Our promises and our salvation have

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<sup>13</sup> Many have objected to this and suggest that “Israel of God” could refer to the Jews or all Jews who had converted to Christ. Hendriksen comments on this line of interpretation, “Now this interpretation tends to make Paul contradict his whole line of reasoning in this epistle. Over against the Judaizers’ perversion of the gospel he has emphasized the fact that ‘the blessing of Abraham’ now rests upon all those, and only upon those, ‘who are of faith’ (3:9); that all those, and only those, ‘who belong to Christ’ are ‘heirs according to promise’ (3:29). These are the very people who ‘walk by the Spirit’ (5:16), and ‘are led by the Spirit’ (5:18). Moreover, to make his meaning very clear, the apostle has even called special attention to the fact that God bestows his blessings on all true believers, regardless of nationality, race, social position, or sex . . . And would he now, at the very close of the letter, undo all this by first of all pronouncing a blessing on ‘as many as’ (or: ‘all’) who walk by the rule of glorying in the cross, be they Jew or Gentile by birth, and then pronouncing a blessing upon those who do not (or: do not yet) walk by that rule? I refuse to accept that explanation.” (William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968], 246-7).

John Eadie argues against this view stating, “To the apostle there were two Israels—‘they are not all Israel which are of Israel,’—and he now says here, not Israel *κἄτα σαρκά*, but ‘the Israel of God,’ or the true believing Israel; his own brethren by a double tie—by blood, and especially by grace. Was it unnatural for the apostle to do this, especially after rebuking false Israel—the wretched Judaizers—who certainly were not the Israel of God?” (John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869], 471).

everything to do with God's choice of Jesus Christ. Abraham's election was effectual for all those who would be a part of Israel, and Christ's election is effectual for all those who are a part of the church. Neither in God's choice of national Israel nor in His choice of the corporate body of Christ do we find a decision to save some while rejecting, or worse, reprobating others. We simply have the election of the One who will bring blessings to all those who are found in identification with Him.

In the case of Israel, this point is easily illustrated from the Old Testament. Being in physical relation to Abraham or the rest of the nation of Israel did not guarantee one's election, but it was the spiritual identification with Israel that determined one's salvation (cf. Rom. 9:6). There is the case of Ruth (Ruth 1:16) and Rahab (Joshua 6:17). Both were saved because of their recognition and faith in the God of Israel. Mention must also be made of the many Persian converts to Judaism that we see in Esther 8:17. Salvation was open to these Gentiles and they partook of the election of Israel, regardless of national origin. Thus, the only concept of election in the Old Testament is a corporate one, not individual.

Interestingly, the inverse is also true. One's birth as an Israelite did not guarantee that one would partake of the election of Israel. In Romans 3:1-2, it is clear that Israel has been granted many national privileges, but based on Romans 2:28-29 and 9:6, we see that these national blessings are not sufficient for one's salvation. The election to which I am referring is quite different. It is an Israel within Israel in that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel"<sup>14</sup> For we see that many Israelites, before

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller discussion of election as it occurs in Romans 9, see Brian J. Abasciano's article on the subject. In his response to Schreiner, he argues for the corporate nature of election in Romans 9 and posits individual election only as it relates to the corporate body. (Brian J. Abasciano, "Corporate Election in

and after Christ, failed to be saved because of unbelief and were cut off from the blessings of the corporate, elect Israel (Rom. 11:17-24). Thus, while the destiny of the corporate elect may be certain, individuals may be added to or cut off from the elect.

**Unconditional election of Christ.** In Ephesians 1:3-4, the election is placed “before the foundation of the world.” Completely foreign to the text is any human activity or merit as a factor in God’s choice. Therefore, it can be correctly described as unconditional. But as it has been demonstrated above, Ephesians is a book about the universal body, and as illustrated in Israel, individuals can be added to or subtracted from this body. It would then follow that the unconditional, pre-temporal election described in this passage is not an election of individuals. Correlating this passage with what we find in 1 Peter 2 will further demonstrate that Christ is the Elect One through whom we are elect only upon our belief in Him.

In 1 Peter 2:6, the apostle quotes Isaiah 28:16 in reference to Christ. The Lord Jesus is here pictured as a “cornerstone, chosen [ἐκλεκτὸν] and precious.” There is no other elect one mentioned in this passage besides Jesus Christ. Notice, though, that there is somewhat of an invitation to take part of the election of this cornerstone with the phrase “whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” Through belief in the elect One, we have salvation. In verse 9, Peter explains our standing in the elect One using corporate language that echoes back to the nation of Israel calling us a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” Verse 10 points us back to our past reminding us that before we were “not a people” but now we are “God’s people.” As individuals who were once outside of Christ, our past serves to explain that

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Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schreiner,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* vol. 29 no. 2 [June 2006]: 351-71).

our standing in Christ is contingent upon our belief in Him (v.6). This logically follows from the fact that we weren't considered "a people" until our encounter with God's elect Son. The salvation thusly described was not based on a pre-temporal choice but on our faith and subsequent entrance into the corporate elect. Now, we have become a part of that "holy nation" (v.9).

### **Destiny of the Elect**

The destiny of the elect in Ephesians 1:3-4 seems clear and certain. God's elect was chosen before time to be "holy and blameless" (ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους). This description refers to the eschatological condition of the church when it is presented before Christ (Eph. 5:27). Certainly, no one can enter the presence and glory of God who has not been washed by "water with the word" found to be "holy and without blemish" (ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος). While the destiny of the elect in Ephesians 1 seems to be the unconditional guarantee of this state of holiness and blamelessness, the destiny of individuals is not unconditional or certain in this regard.

As Shank puts it "God's eternal purpose in grace" is that we should be holy and blameless. While God's "fulfillment corporately" is laid out in Ephesians 5:27, the "fulfillment individually" is found in Colossian 1:22-23.<sup>15</sup> Here, we are assured that we will be presented "holy and blameless" (ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους) if we "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you have heard . . ." From this passage, it should be understood that the individual's election is contingent upon his perseverance in the faith.

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<sup>15</sup> Shank, *Elect in the Son*, 49.



Some would point out that the condition in these verses is a *real condition* with its use of εἴ (if) and the indicative mood. Typically in the New Testament such a conditional statement assumes that the protasis (if clause) is either plainly true or plainly contrary to fact (indicated by the particle ὅτι). In the case of Colossians 1:23 it could be stated that we will be presented holy and without blame *since* we are continuing in the faith, where the protasis is an assumed reality.<sup>16</sup> But this rendering should only be applied if the protasis contains a known objective reality. The protasis in real conditions is not necessarily understood as absolute. Dunn writes concerning the conditional clause, “εἴ γε may denote confidence more than doubt (cf. its use in 2 Cor. 5:3; Eph. 3:2; 4:21), but final acceptance is nevertheless dependent on remaining in the faith.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Colossians 1:22-23 should be understood as an admonition for genuine believers to continue in the faith. Such a warning passage should not come as a surprise. For there are many passages in the New Testament in which believers are given such a charge to persevere (cf. Romans 11:22; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2) as well as warnings to believers against apostasy (cf. Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29, 38; 2 Peter 1:6-12; 2:20-22).<sup>18</sup>

The implications of this interpretation prove to be quite divisive among scholars. If it is understood that an individual believer’s final acceptance by God and glorification are conditional upon his continuance in the faith, Ephesians 1:3-4 cannot be a reference

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<sup>16</sup> This is also called a *first class condition*.

<sup>17</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110.

<sup>18</sup> For what could be considered the definitive work on the Arminian perspective of perseverance and apostasy, see Shank’s *Life in the Son* (Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1960]). Typically, Arminians have pointed to what seems to be the plain meaning of warnings against apostasy in Hebrews, and Shank devotes extensive consideration of this topic in his book. For a Calvinistic perspective on such warning passages, see Grudem’s chapter in *Still Sovereign*. (Wayne Grudem, *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 133-182).

to individual election. For, without question, God’s choice in these verses is a pre-temporal, unconditional choice, not based on any factor other than “the purpose of his will” (v. 5). It would be *eisegesis* to insert some influence on God as the deciding factor in His act of electing the church as a corporate body. Prescience of someone’s future belief is totally absent from the text and shouldn’t be used to explain election in Ephesians. However, when we read Colossians 1:22-23, we see that there is a condition placed on the individuals’ election—perseverance. Considering the conditional aspect of Colossians 1 and the unconditional aspect of Ephesians 1, it stands to reason that they could not be referring to the same election. Therefore, Ephesians 1:3-4 is a reference to the corporate elect since it cannot be referring to the conditional election of individuals.

### **Responding to Objections Against a Corporate Interpretation**

With the position of corporate election becoming a prominent view among many Arminian scholars, there has been an outcry of criticisms against it. As explained in the preceding section, proponents of corporate election interpret Ephesians 1:3-4 in a much different light than their Calvinistic brethren. Naturally, much of the criticisms raised center around this passage. As it stands, those in the Reformed tradition are thoroughly unconvinced by a corporate interpretation and the objections they raise deserve thoughtful consideration. This section will seek to provide some answers.

#### **Objection #1: Election Refers to Choice Out of a Group**

This objection calls corporate election into question by positing that “choice out of group” could not refer to the corporate body since this idea relies wholly upon the election of Christ. Obviously, Christ could not have been chosen out of a group given His uniqueness. Therefore, the corporate body must be a reference to individuals who

were chosen out of the world. However, it is the very election of Christ that proves this term to have a meaning more flexible than this. Jesus is God's Elect One (cf. Luke 9:35; 1 Peter 2:6), and certainly He was not chosen out of many.

Crawford raises this initial objection in his article on the nature of election, and he argues for the literal understanding of "elected" in Ephesians 1:4 to mean "chosen out of a group." But he responds to the point of Christ's election stating, "It would be unwise to use the election of Christ as a standard in defining the meaning of the word, since He is unique in every respect and certainly to be distinguished from fallen humanity in the matter of election."<sup>19</sup> It may be correct that Christ's election should not be used as the standard determining word meaning. However, this seems to miss the point of the argument. A proper interpretation of the passage leaves no room for any other election than Christ's corporate body. The corporate nature of the epistle along with the idea of the elect in Christ as a part of His body, seated currently with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:11-22) demonstrates this. Also, given the fact that the election of individuals is shown elsewhere to be conditional (cf. Col. 1:22-23), no other option is left for the interpretation of the unconditionally elect of Ephesians 1:3-4. Thus, the corporate argument does not attempt to use Christ's election to modify the normative usage of word. Rather, the argument affirms that only the election of Christ is intended.

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<sup>19</sup> Crawford, "Ephesians," 79.

**Objection #2: Christ's Election is Not parallel to Christians' Election<sup>20</sup>**

This objection calls to attention the differences in God's choice of Christ and God's choice of believers. Christ was chosen to be the Savior of the world, while Christians are chosen to be saved from their sin. Therefore, their election cannot be the same. This is a logical argument, but it fails to take many factors into consideration. Ephesians 1:3-4 correlates with Ephesians 5:27. In both passages, God's eternal purpose is that the church should be ἁγίους καὶ ἄμώμους. The church is pictured implicitly in Ephesians as the body of Christ (2:5-6) and explicitly so in 1 Corinthians 11:27. Thus, it would not be incorrect to view the election of the church (Eph. 5:27) to be holy and blameless as the election of a corporate body in Christ (1:3-4). Second, given the uniqueness of Christ, it would not be inconsistent to view His election as a corporate body, holy and blameless for all who would believe, and also as the Savior and "cornerstone" (1 Pet. 2:6). Christ serves as the *locus standi* of our election while at the same time, He is chosen to be the means by which this election is made possible.

**Objection # 3: Ephesians 1:4 Does Not Say that Christ Was Elected**

In Ephesians 1:4, the text reads, "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." The real question lies in the meaning of ἡμῶν in this verse. As our argument has already stressed, it is not likely that it refers to individuals because individual election is described as conditional, whereas the election in these verses is described as unconditional. Still, Schreiner states, "It is incorrect to see the emphasis on the election of Christ inasmuch as

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 85.

the verse stresses the election of people.”<sup>21</sup> He continues to argue that even if election were corporate, that corporate body would still consist of individuals. Otherwise, “God simply chose that there be a ‘thing’ called the church, and then he decided that all who would put their faith in Christ would become part of the church.”<sup>22</sup>

First, I am aware of no advocate of corporate election that espouses this idea. Schreiner has caricatured the position creating a straw man argument. God did not decide that there would be a “thing” called the church and that whoever believed would become a part of that thing. Rather, God chose a person—Jesus Christ—and He decided that salvation’s plan would be accomplished through Christ (Eph. 3:10-12; 2 Tim. 1:9-10). When Schreiner finally offers terms that represent the position more accurately (i.e. election in Christ), he dismisses the idea by stating that Christ is not said to have been elected in Ephesians 1:4.<sup>23</sup> With that, there is no question that ἡμεῖς is the object of God’s Choice. But again, this pronoun is modified by the prepositional phrase ἐν αὐτῷ with Christ being the antecedent noun for αὐτῷ. This places Christ as the foundation for our election. If the universal church is being referred to in this verse, we can conclude that it refers to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). Given this fact, it would be incorrect to separate the election of the body of Christ with the election of Christ Himself (1 Peter 2:6), even though in this passage he is being presented as the foundation of our election. In this sense Christ is the elect One Who is the head of the body, yet at the same time, He is the necessary foundation which makes it possible for there to be an elect body.

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<sup>21</sup> Schreiner, *Still Sovereign*, 101.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-3.

An interpretation that views certain individuals elected in Christ has many problems of its own. As mentioned above, for individuals to have been “in Christ” from eternity past, there is no adequate explanation as to how they could be in condemnation before they are regenerated (John 1:18, 36) considering the fact that no condemnation exists for those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). At any rate, proper Scripture correlation will lead us to 1 Peter 2:6 where Christ is the elect One, and all those who place their faith in Him are saved.

#### **Objection #4: “Chose Us in Him” Simply Means That God Chose That We Would Eventually Be Saved Through Christ**

It appears that Calvinists have foreseen the aforementioned problem concerning the elect being “in Christ” from eternity past, yet also being under condemnation before their regeneration. This, of course, would be inconsistent with the testimony of the New Testament concerning the salvific phrase “in Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, they argue that Ephesians 1:4 is not about election in Christ *per se*. Rather, it is about God’s choice of men who would eventually be saved *through Christ*.<sup>25</sup> An incredible amount of *eisegesis* is required to arrive at this point. A plain reading of the text tells us that our election was in Christ and this election was “before the foundation of the world.”

In order for the suggested meaning to be true, the text would need to read, “He chose us to be in Him before the foundation of the world.” Leslie James Crawford still asserts, “The formula [ἐν Χριστῷ] would therefore explain the condition of the elect

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<sup>24</sup> See above section entitled, “Is a Pre-temporal Individual Election Consistent with New Testament Theology?”

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

when their election is realized. The historical realization of God's electing activity is the elects' mystical union with Christ."<sup>26</sup> This view, however, disregards that the election in Christ takes place pre-temporally meaning the elect's mystical union with Christ is not realized in history but rather before the foundation of the world. Thus, the Calvinistic problem concerning the elect who are condemned while, at the same time, in Christ persists.

### **Objection #5: The Elect Are Eternally Secure**

The truth of apostasy in Scripture is one factor that makes corporate election so compelling. In this view, one's participation in the elect does not guarantee his final salvation. Individuals can be added to the elect as well as taken away just as we find in Paul's olive tree illustration (Rom. 11:17-24). Thus, since individual election is contingent upon belief and perseverance, the unconditional election of Ephesians 1 cannot be applied to individuals. Still, Calvinists would maintain that the reasoning behind this is flawed since the elect are eternally secure without any danger of apostatizing or forfeiting their salvation. Lengthy treatment could be given to the doctrine of apostasy, but for this objection it would be best to look to one passage in particular that leads Calvinists, as well as some non-Calvinists, to hold so strongly to eternal security.<sup>27</sup>

Romans 8:28-30 is a passage that appears to support eternal security, and Calvinists are right to stress the importance of this passage in regard to the overall

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<sup>26</sup> Crawford, "Ephesians," 85.

<sup>27</sup> Without a doubt, Calvinists have other arguments supporting their beliefs about perseverance, but many people find the following to be the most compelling.

salvation debate. Charles Hodge comments on Romans 8:29-30, “Election, calling, justification, and salvation are idissolubly united; and, therefore, he who has clear evidence of his being called has the same evidence of his election and final salvation.”<sup>28</sup>

With this unbreakable chain, it would be certain that one who is justified will be glorified. Thus, if one’s glorification is secured at the time of justification, there is no fear of losing one’s salvation in the time in between.

However compelling this argument may seem, there is nothing in the passage that suggests that those who are justified will inevitably be glorified. Rather, it can only be said that all who will be glorified were certainly once justified. Witherington notes, “The tenses of the verbs here make clear that we should take them as if Paul were looking at things from the eschatological end of the process with even glorification already having transpired.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, as this is a perception of the events after they have transpired, they can be stated with such certainty. What is not proven is that all who are justified will definitely be glorified any more than all who are called will definitely be justified. Many instances can be shown where a call to salvation was given in Scripture and then rejected by men who refused to repent (cf. Matt. 23:37; Acts 13:46; Heb. 12:25). Thus, the “golden chain of redemption” is not indissoluble in actuality, and a proper hermeneutic of Romans 8:29-30 does not present any challenge for a corporate interpretation of Ephesians. 1:3-4.

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<sup>28</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1851), 207.

<sup>29</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Waco: Baylor, 2005), 77.



## Election and Foreknowledge

As aforementioned, many evangelical scholars hold that election to salvation is based solely on God's foreknowledge of one's faith in Christ. In this sense, God has a passive knowledge of a person's future faith. Thus, in Romans 8:29-30, God predestined the elect to salvation only because He foreknew they would believe. To most Calvinistic scholars, this view of foreknowledge is inadequate. They maintain that *to foreknow* is to *fore-love*.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, Calvinists have posited that foreknowledge and election are one and the same.<sup>31</sup>

For our present discussion, we must determine how God's foreknowledge relates to election. In the section above, I demonstrated that election is pre-temporal, but that it does not include individuals. Other evangelical scholars have posited that it does include individuals, but only those whom God foreknew would believe. In this section, there will be an examination of passages that appear to relate election to God's prescience. Also, an effort toward a correct understanding of foreknowledge will be put forth as we examine the Calvinistic claim that foreknowledge refers to *fore-love*. This section will serve to demonstrate that pre-temporal election was not based on any influencing factor outside of God. Further, the Calvinistic view that foreknowledge is actually God's election of individuals will also be refuted. This will leave us with the conclusion that

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<sup>30</sup> S. M. Baugh has written on this point extensively in his "The Meaning of Foreknowledge." (S. M. Baugh, *Still Sovereign*, 183-200). A response to Baugh's study on foreknowledge can be found in McCall and Stanglin's article in the *Trinity Journal*. (Tom McCall and Keith D. Stanglin, "S. M. Baugh and the Meaning of Foreknowledge: Another Look," *Trinity Journal* vol. 26, no. 1 [Spring 2005]: 19-31).

<sup>31</sup> John MacArthur states, "God's foreknowledge, therefore, is not a reference to His omniscient foresight but to His foreordination." (John MacArthur, Jr., *Saved Without a Doubt* [Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1992], 59).

pre-temporal election is corporate and unconditional as opposed to either individual and conditional or individual and unconditional.

### **Does God Elect Based on Foreknowledge of Future Belief?**

First, we must look to Ephesians 1:3-4. This passage speaks as clearly to the doctrine of election as any passage in the New Testament. If election were based on God's prescience of man's belief, one could expect the idea to appear somewhere in this text. However, the concept of God's election based on any condition whatsoever is totally foreign to the text. One cannot prove anything with an argument from silence, but it can at least be admitted that the silence in this passage is a very awkward one for those who hold to a foreknowledge-based election. Calvinists like James White are quick to point out, "[U]nless one inserts some concept *into* the passage from outside, it is clearly the author's intention to place this decision completely outside the realm of human activity by placing it in the timeless realms of eternity."<sup>32</sup> Based solely on Ephesians 1:3-4, we have no grounds to insert foreknowledge into God's act of election.

Next, Romans 8:28-30 as well as 1 Peter 1:2 must be brought into consideration. These texts are commonly appealed to in order to affirm a foreknowledge-based election. Romans 8:29 states, "For those he did foreknow he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." It would appear from this verse that predestination at least is based on foreknowledge. In 1 Peter 1:2 we have Peter's address to the exiles who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (NKJV). Thus, based on these passages alone, one could easily conclude that God's election must be based on foreknowledge.

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<sup>32</sup> James R. White, *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 93.

A more complete exegesis will be offered for both of these passages below, but we can rule out a simple foreknowledge-based election with a consideration of a simple question posed by S. M. Baugh, “Whom does God not foreknow cognitively?”<sup>33</sup> The answer, of course, would be no one. This simple question illustrates what the foreknowledge interpretation leaves to be desired. In Romans 8:28-30 as well as 1 Peter 1:2, we are not told that a foreknowledge of our belief is being referred to. This brings us back to Baugh’s question. The position of an election based on foreknowledge cannot prove what is actually being foreknown by God. Thus, we are left with the basic idea that God simply foreknows the individual, not necessarily based on any choice made by that individual, and mostly all evangelicals agree that God, in his omniscience, foreknows every individual. If one holds that foreknowledge is the basis for election, one is practically forced to accept that foreknowledge refers to a loving relationship as opposed to mere prescience based on the fact that God would have mere prescience for everyone who has ever lived. Thankfully, this is not the only way of interpreting election or the aforementioned foreknowledge texts. At any rate, the foreknowledge argument is based on an assumption that cannot be derived from the text, namely that God’s foreknowledge includes our choice to believe.

### **Is Foreknowledge Equivalent to Election?**

The conclusion that foreknowledge does not refer to prescience of belief is a justified one. However, one is still left with the idea of πρόγνωσις. As mentioned above, the classic Calvinistic view will take this practically to mean election. It should be mentioned, however, that there is no basis for this etymologically. In fact, we can point

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<sup>33</sup> Baugh, *Still Sovereign*, 191.

to passages in which the word is definitely used in the sense of prescience. In 2 Peter 3:17, we find the participial use of the word, and it is accurately rendered, “knowing beforehand.” There is no idea contained in the passage of choice or a loving relationship for that matter. It is simply knowledge ahead of time.

Its verb form, προγινώσκω, is used twice in the New Testament with God as subject in the active voice (Rom. 8:29; 11:2). Romans 11:2, in particular, demonstrates that there is no merit to accept that foreknowledge refers to God’s decision to save individuals. The reference in the passage is to God’s foreknowledge of Israel. If this were a personal salvific knowledge of Israel, the argument of the Jewish objectors would be valid, i.e., God foreknew Israel, and foreknowledge is God’s choice to save. Therefore, Israel must be saved. However, Paul explains in his metaphor of the olive tree that many of the branches of Israel were “broken off because of their unbelief” (Rom. 11:20). This is followed by a severe warning from the apostle to believers against apostasy (11:21-22). Paul’s warning to believers against their being cut off serves to demonstrate that foreknowledge is not an unconditional choice made by God to save certain individuals. Israel was foreknown by God, yet many within the nation failed to be saved. Believers in Christ, too, are foreknown by God (cf. Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2), yet they can be cut off just as the unbelieving Israelites.

Unfortunately, these unjustified inferences are often applied to passages containing the term foreknowledge. As demonstrated above, to infer that election is based on foreknowledge of belief is *eisegesis*. And a Calvinistic view, no less, may be guilty of over-translating the term. However, there is often good reason to conclude that God’s foreknowledge could be used of His determinate choice. For instance, Barnes

correctly observes, “Peter declares that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20), meaning that it was God’s plan and purpose to send him into the world.”<sup>34</sup> This interpretation can hardly be denied from the context, but the word itself must be examined in light of the context of each individual passage. It would be incorrect to apply this particular meaning to every passage where the term is used, just as it would be improper hermeneutics to apply its meaning in 2 Peter 3:17 (simply knowledge beforehand) to 1 Peter 1:20. As we deal below with 1 Peter 1:1-2 and Romans 8:28-30, the word foreknowledge will not have any such assumed meaning.

**1 Peter 1:2.** First Peter 1:1-2 is perhaps the clearest connection in the New Testament between election and foreknowledge. The term that we must first examine is the adjective ἐκλεκτοῖς. In the phrase found in 1 Peter 1:1, it modifies παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς. Thus the ESV renders it, “elect exiles of the dispersion.” It should be noted how this particular phrase bears on the concept of corporate election. It is certainly not the entire body of Christ being referred to here, so we would seemingly see the exiles as possessing an individual election. The same could be said for the “elect lady” and her “elect sister” of whom we read in 2 John 1, 13. However, this terminology should not be taken to mean that they were elected from the foundation of the world. “When people enter into Christ then not only does His death become theirs, but His election becomes their election. They are chosen in Him, and this chosenness was established even before the foundation of the world.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is not the choice of individuals to be in Christ that we have here. Rather, we have an adjective describing the believer’s state in Christ.

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Barnes, “Election According to the Foreknowledge of God,” *The Banner of Truth* vol. 485 no. 152 (2004): 10.

<sup>35</sup> Forster and Marston, *God’s Strategy*, 136.

Verse 2 ascribes to the term *elect* three modifying prepositional phrases. They are 1) κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρὸς 2) ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος and 3) εἰς ὑπακοήν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. It is correct to say that the exiles were elect “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” However, it would be easy to take a very limited approach to this passage without considering that our three prepositional phrases could actually modify all of the preceding information in accordance with the grammar of the passage, not just the term *elect*.<sup>36</sup> Thus, *foreknowledge* would make sense if used more broadly to refer to God’s knowledge and concern with the exiles current situation as well as Peter’s apostleship (v. 1). Limiting the interpretation to a determinative choice of certain individuals is not warranted based upon the grammar or context.<sup>37</sup>

**Romans 8:28-30.** Romans 8:28-30 does not mention election *per se*. However, most Calvinists would make little difference between *foreknowledge* and *election*. Also, the elements described in verse 29 are definitely salvific and would be considered at the very least to be the benefits of election. As Shank puts it, “Predestination is God’s predetermination of the eternal *circumstance* of election: sonship and inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ (Eph. 1:5-11) and glorification together with Christ in full conformity to

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<sup>36</sup> Hort held to this particular position. (F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: I.1-II.17* [New York: Macmillan, 1898], 167-84).

<sup>37</sup> “The readers’ situation as *chosen refugees* has not escaped that active and concerned knowledge of God. He has always known about them and has been at work to secure their well-being. However, Peter does not base God’s choice of some to be Christians on his foreknowledge, whether it be the alleged strong sense of foreordination or the face-value sense of prior knowledge (as of eventual faith). Both miss the mark of this passage.” (William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* [Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990], 240-41).

His image (Rom. 8:28-30).”<sup>38</sup> So in order to understand the true meaning of the relation of foreknowledge to election, this passage is very important.

First, we will examine the term προέγνω. The aforementioned definition typically ascribed to this word by Calvinists cannot be taken as a necessary definition in every case. Some Calvinistic scholars have described “foreknow” in this passage to be in reference to “God’s choosing to enter into loving relationship with the elect prior to their even coming into existence, that is, from eternity past.”<sup>39</sup> With this view in mind, prescience would not be considered sufficient to describe the relationship between the elect and God. This touches on an interesting concept in the Calvinistic interpretive framework. Either this so-called “loving relationship” is only an ideal relationship in the mind of God that looks to the future when the relationship will be actualized in time, or it is an actual relationship which God has entered into with a person before they even exist.

With much of their emphasis being placed on *to know* as a covenantal term, it would seem that the Calvinistic school of thought must hold to the latter idea of an actual relationship between God and a non-existent person. S. M. Baugh comments on Amos 3:2-3 in which the Hebrew term *yāda* (know) is used to express a covenant between God and Israel. He states, “Clearly the verb in Amos 3:2 has to do with a personal relationship, illustrated in the next verse by an appointment or agreement between two travelers.”<sup>40</sup> Baugh has correctly pointed out that the relationship described in Amos 3:2-3 is a mutual one in which both parties are active given the statement, “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?” He does so in support of the view that claims

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<sup>38</sup> Shank, *Elect in the Son*, 156.

<sup>39</sup> James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 245.

<sup>40</sup> Baugh, *Still Sovereign*, 193.

God's foreknowledge is a "loving relationship." However, if it is this type of covenant language that is employed to demonstrate this aspect of foreknowledge, how could there be a mutual loving relationship before one party ever existed? "This whole line of thinking seems self contradictory. The words 'to have a two-way relationship with a non-existent person' do not even state an *impossibility*. They do not state anything at all. They are simply a collection of words in a meaningless series."<sup>41</sup> Thus, the idea can be rejected that foreknowledge is a choice of God to enter a loving relationship with non-existent human beings.

In Romans 8:28-30, a better interpretation of προέγνω would be similar to the nuance suggested above for its noun cognate in 1 Peter 1:1-2. God had a full and complete knowledge of the Christians to which Paul was writing long before they came into existence. However, this full and complete knowledge does not denote a loving relationship or a determinative choice on the part of God. It would be more appropriate and less presumptuous to conclude that believers are to take comfort in the fact that God has foreknown us in all our sufferings and trials, and He has given us a destiny of being conformed to Christ's image because we have become part of His elect body. This is a fact that doesn't necessarily depend on His foreknowledge of any action on our part nor of a loving relationship we had with Him before we existed.

### **Conclusion**

The intention of this thesis has been to demonstrate from Scripture that election is primarily corporate and Christocentric. We can conclude based on the argumentation therein, that Ephesians 1:3-4 refers to the corporate elect in Christ. This interpretation maintains a pre-temporal election in which God, for His own good pleasure, chose a

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<sup>41</sup> Forster and Marston, *God's Strategy*, 198.



person, a plan, and corporate body to benefit from the plan. However, we are never informed that His choice included particular individuals. Rather, only those who participated in and identified with the elect One could be saved (1 Peter 2:6).

A Calvinistic interpretation of election offers no satisfactory answers with regard to an individual's election being contingent upon perseverance. Colossians 1:23 states plainly that only those who continue in the faith will be presented ἁγίους καὶ ἄμώμους. However, in Ephesians 1:4, it states with certainty that the elect will be ἁγίους καὶ ἄμώμους. Colossians presents a contingent idea while Ephesians 1:4 presents a certain, unconditional idea. Therefore, since election in Ephesians 1:4 could not refer to the individuals of Colossians 1:22-23, it must refer to the church of Ephesians 5:27, who is also said to be ἁγία καὶ ἄμωμος.

Further, the election of individuals "in Christ" before the foundation of the world would mean that these individuals could never have been condemned (Rom. 8:1). However, Jesus said that all those who do not believe are presently condemned and presently under the wrath of God (John 3:18; 36). To be consistent, Calvinists who hold to individual election would have to conclude that it is possible to be "in Christ" yet condemned at the same time. This would be a total contradiction of terms.

Other theories such as that which posits election based on foreseen faith have also proven insufficient in explaining the unconditional election of Ephesians 1. Passages that present election and foreknowledge or predestination and foreknowledge as connected are not explicit about what God actually foreknows about that individual. Thus, to claim it is based on foreseen faith would be *eisegesis*.

Further, the suggestion that election and foreknowledge are one in the same was shown to have problems not only etymologically but also exegetically. If that were the case, it would imply that God entered into a loving relationship with a non-existent person from eternity past. To have a relationship with someone who does not exist is an incoherent idea and a meaningless concept. Thus, in an attempt at interpreting Scripture in light of Scripture and keeping an exegetically sound hermeneutic, corporate election is the most consistent interpretation of Ephesians 1:3-4.

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