CLEARING UP MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CORPORATE ELECTION

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I. *INTRODUCTION*

The nature of election has long been one of the most hotly debated topics in evangelical theology. The question lies at the heart of the debate between Arminianism and Calvinism, a debate which commands so much interest and attention because it ultimately has to do with the character of God. But beyond the inherent appeal the disagreement between Arminianism and Calvinism holds for those with a high view of Scripture, the debate has been raging with a heightened intensity in recent years with no sign of abating due to factors such as (1) the current resurgence of Calvinism in evangelicalism (which, in its popular form, must be considered more Arminian than Calvinist overall),[1] (2) the popularity of the internet, where on the one hand multitudes of

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[1] On this resurgence, see Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *Christianity Today*, September 2006, the by-line of which claims, "Calvinism is making a

laymen now flock to gain theological information, and on the other hand Calvinists have been quite prolific, and (3) the advent of influential outlooks such as Open Theism and the New Perspective on Paul, the former directly opposed to Calvinism and the latter providing various insights that can be effectively pressed into service by Arminians (whether or not they agree with the view in general) to support their system.

Traditionally, both Calvinism and Arminianism have conceived of election unto salvation as individual. That is, each individual is elected individually to belong to God. On this view, election of the body of God's people refers to the election of the group as a consequence of the discrete election of each individual who is chosen and their gathering into a group of people sharing a common experience of individual election. The main difference between the two views has been that Calvinists view election as unconditional and Arminians view it as conditional on divine foreknowledge of human faith. But there is another view of election which ultimately supports Arminian theology and has come to command a great deal of scholarly support—the view of corporate election. Indeed, in a text like Romans 9, which is a *locus classicus* for the doctrine of election, corporate election of one sort or another has become the most dominant type of election perceived by interpreters.[2] Its popularity has probably been due largely to the scholarly

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comeback—and shaking up the church." Hansen has since published a book on the subject: *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

[2] Cf. Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.1-9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis* (JSNTSup/LNTS, 301; London: T & T Clark,

community's greatly increased sensitivity to the signal importance of the Jewish matrix of early Christianity and the profound indebtedness to the Old Testament on the part of the New Testament authors.

But despite its growing popularity, the doctrine has been criticized by some advocates of individual election, particularly Calvinists, whose position it directly contradicts.[3] However, these criticisms are misguided, largely founded upon

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2005) 185. The issue is complicated in the case of Rom 9 because interpreters posit various conceptions of corporate election there, some that take it to be unto service, others as unto salvation, others as merely national/temporal vis-à-vis ethnic Israel, and others that seem to exclude any reference to individuals in the concept. What's more, some of these conceptions can be mixed with one another to form still other forms of the view. In any case, this article is concerned with Christian election, articulating and defending a concept of corporate election unto salvation that includes individuals within its scope.

[3] See e.g., John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation? Some Exegetical and Theological Reflections" *JETS* 36 (1993) 25-40; idem, "Corporate and Individual Election in Romans 9: A Response to Brian Abasciano" *JETS* 49/2 (June 2006) 373-386; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 571, 585-86; idem, "The Theology of Romans 9-11: A Response to E. Elizabeth Johnson" in David M. Hay and Elizabeth E. Johnson (eds.), *Pauline Theology III: Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress,

misunderstanding of the biblical concept of corporate election.[4] Once these misconceptions are cleared away, it should be seen that corporate election is indeed the

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1995, 240-58) 254-58; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Pillar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 99; and the response to Clark Pinnock by Bruce A. Ware in Chad Owen Brand (ed.), *Perspectives on Election: Five Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) 315-18. Arminian scholars holding to individual election have also objected to corporate election (see e.g., Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, and Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* [Nashville: Randall House, 2002], 50-52; Jack Cottrell, "Conditional Election" in Clark H. Pinnock (ed.), *Grace Unlimited* [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975, 51-73] 56-60), but they are not as zealous in their opposition.

[4] But to be fair, some objections to corporate election have been in response to inadequate views of the concept such as those that restrict election to service and/or that exclude individuals from its purview; for such a view, see e.g. (in relation to Rom 9), Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 356-57. For further examples and a critique of such views, see Schreiner, "Reflections." But again, to be fair, most advocates of corporate election probably give a place to individuals, understanding individuals to be encompassed in the group to which they belong, even if their language gives the impression that individuals are excluded (which could be true of Morris). Indeed, Schreiner's critique ("Reflections," 33-40) of the corporate view argues against a conception of corporate election that denies any place to the individual, even though the representative of corporate election with whom he interacts most does afford a place to

most biblical view of election, vindicating the Arminian approach to the doctrine, even if untraditionally. Therefore, this article will first briefly review the proper understanding of corporate election, and then address various misconceptions and criticisms of it.

II. *THE CONCEPT OF CORPORATE ELECTION*[5]

II.1. *General Considerations*

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individuals in his scheme; see e.g., William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 264–65. (Klein has now clarified his position in response to Schreiner in an unpublished paper entitled, "Is Corporate Election Merely Virtual Election? A Case Study in Contextualization," available online at http://evangelicalarminians.org/Klein-%22Is-Corporate-Election-Merely-Virtual-Election%3F%22.) This leaves Schreiner's case empty, leveled at what amounts to a straw man version of corporate election; see Brian J. Abasciano, "Corporate Election in Romans 9: A Reply to Thomas Schreiner," *JETS* 49/2 (June 2006) 351-71.

[5] I have discussed the concept of corporate election and attempted to articulate the distinction between it and individual election in a prior article ("Election"). Rather than constantly referencing that article for further discussion and explication of many of the issues discussed throughout the present article, I here direct readers' attention to it generally, and will reserve citation of it for material that is especially important to place before readers of the present essay.

The discussion of corporate election has often been thrown off course by pitting corporate and individual election against one another. To some extent, this is unavoidable because there is obviously some difference between the concepts, and the type of election with which one begins leads to vastly different positions concerning the overall nature of election. But each type of election logically entails some type of the other. So the question actually boils down to which type of election is primary (see below). It is convenient for the purpose of assessing the primary orientation of election to speak in terms of corporate vs. individual. But it must be remembered that it is primary orientations that are to be pitted against one another and not exclusion of individuals vs. exclusion of the group. To represent the issue more accurately, I submit that it would be best to speak of primarily corporate election vs. individualistic (as opposed to merely individual) election, though it would be too burdensome always to qualify corporate election in this way.

Most simply, corporate election refers to the choice of a group, which entails the choice of its individual members by virtue of their membership in the group. Thus, individuals are not elected as individuals directly, but secondarily as members of the elect group. Nevertheless, corporate election necessarily entails a type of individual election because of the inextricable connection between any group and the individuals who belong to it.[6] Individuals are elect as a consequence of their membership in the group.

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[6] Still, a corporate focus means that not everything that is true of the group is necessarily true of the individual.

Individualistic election, on the other hand, refers to the direct choice of individuals as autonomous entities, which entails the choice of the group (if one is involved) by virtue of the elect status of the individuals who make up the group. Thus, the group is not elected directly as a group, but secondarily as a collection of individually chosen persons. In other words, the group is chosen as a consequence of the fact that each individual in the group was individually chosen. If there were to be any prominence granted to the group over individuals in such a scheme, then the furthest this view could go would be to orient individual election toward the group by viewing individual election as the discrete choice of an individual to belong to the group of those who are also individually elected to join the group. Hence, the real question regarding the election of God's covenant people is, which election is primary, that of the group or that of the individual? Both views are logically coherent,[7] and concrete examples can be given of each from everyday life.

II.2. *Biblical Election unto Salvation*

So far in this section we have been talking about the general concept of election, and not specifically the election of God's covenant people, which in the New Covenant entails election unto eternal salvation. When we turn to the Bible on the matter of the election of God's people, it becomes clear that corporate election predominates. Indeed, I

[7] Schreiner actually claims that the corporate election I have described is logically incoherent ("Response," 375-78), but without question, this is demonstrably false and will be taken up below; see esp. III.3.

would argue that it is the only type of election of God's people to be his people in the Bible.

But the Bible's doctrine of corporate election unto salvation is even more nuanced than simply saying that the group is elected primarily and the individual secondarily. More precisely, it refers to the election of a group as a consequence of the choice of an individual who represents the group, the corporate head and representative. That is, the group is elected as a consequence of its identification with this corporate representative. The same may be said of individuals. They are chosen as a consequence of their identification with the people, and more fundamentally, with the individual corporate head. Thus,

> God chose the people of Israel in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel (Deut 4:37; 7:6-8).[8] That is, by choosing Jacob/Israel, the corporate/covenant representative, God also chose his descendants as his covenant people. It is a matter of Old Testament covenant theology. The covenant representative on the one hand and the people/nation of Israel on the other hand are the focus of the divine covenantal election, and individuals are elect only as members of the elect people. Moreover, in principle, foreign individuals who were not originally members of the elect people could join the chosen people and become part of the elect, demonstrating again that the locus of election was the covenant community and that individuals found their election through membership in the elect people.[9]

This notion of election is rooted in the Old Testament concept of corporate solidarity or representation, which views the individual as representing the community and identified

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[8] Many references could be added, such as Gen. 15:18; 17:7-10, 19; 21:12; 24:7; 25:23; 26:3-5; 28:13-15; Deut. 10:15.

[9] Abasciano, "Election," 353.

with it and vice versa.[10] "The concept is especially evident in the case of kings and patriarchs, who are seen to represent their people and sum them up in themselves, especially in the context of covenant."[11]

We have already noted that God's Old Covenant people were chosen in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. More specifically, God chose Abraham and his descendants, but limited his election of Abraham's descendants to only some of them by his choice of Isaac as the head of the covenant through whom Abraham's covenant descendants were to be reckoned. He then limited his election of the covenant descendants even further by his choice of Jacob as the head of the covenant. At the same time, and as already pointed out above, people not naturally related to Jacob and so not part of the elect people could join the chosen people, becoming part of the elect. On the other hand, individual members of the elect people could be cut off from the covenant people due to violation of the covenant, rendering them non-elect.

Finally, the Apostle Paul would argue, God limited his election even further to Christ as the head of the New Covenant (Gal. 3–4; see especially 3:16; cf. Rom. 3–4; 8), which is the fulfillment of the Old. Paradoxically, this also widened the election of God's people because all who are in Christ by faith are chosen by virtue of their identification with Christ the corporate covenantal head, opening covenant membership to Gentiles as Gentiles. Just as God's Old Covenant people were chosen in Jacob/Israel, the Church was chosen *in Christ* (as Eph. 1:4 puts it). And as Ephesians 2 makes clear, Gentiles who

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[10] See ibid, 355, and the literature cited there.

[11] Ibid.

believe in Christ are in him made to be part of the commonwealth of Israel, fellow citizens with the saints, members of God's household, and possessors of the covenants of promise (2:11-22; note especially vv. 12, 19). Indeed, any Jews who did not believe in Jesus were cut off from the elect people, and any believing Gentiles who stop believing will likewise be cut off, while anyone who comes to faith, whether Jew or Gentile, will be incorporated into God's people (Rom. 11:17-24).

In the New Covenant, God's people are chosen corporately as a consequence of their union with Christ, which is effected by faith.[12] While this is not quite the traditional Arminian position, it fully supports Arminian theology because it is a conditional election. Most directly, such election is conditioned on being in Christ. But then being in Christ is itself conditioned on faith, meaning that the divine election of God's people and the election of individuals for salvation is ultimately conditional on faith in Christ.

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[12] For faith as uniting us with Christ, which is the historic Reformed view, see Eph. 1:13-14; 2; 3:17; John 14:23; Gal. 3:26–28; Rom 6; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 2006); John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 163-80, passim (see e.g. esp. 171 n. 14); Michael F. Bird, "Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Justification," *JETS* 47/2 (June 2004) 253-75, passim; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1; idem, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 16:27; *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 26.1.

III. *CORRECTING MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND ANSWERING CRITICISMS OF CORPORATE ELECTION*

It was not my intention in the previous section to argue for the concept of corporate election so much as to explain it. A positive case has been made for the concept elsewhere by myself and others.[13] It is strongly supported by the fact that it was the

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[13] See Abasciano, 'Election', and the appropriate literature cited there (including esp., Klein, *Election*); Abasciano, *Romans 9.1-9*; idem, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.10-18: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis* (forthcoming in T & T Clark's two series, Library of New Testament Studies and Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity); B.J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance, and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation* (WUNT 2.115. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 204-10; Ben Witherington, III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 230-33, 246-49; William G. MacDonald, "The Biblical Doctrine of Election" in Clark H. Pinnock (ed.), *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 207-29; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 341-54; Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, MO: Westcott, 1970); cf. I. H. Marshall, "Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles" in Pinnock (ed.), G*race of God*, 51-69 (64-69); C. Müller, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit und Gottes Volk: Eine Untersuchung zu Römer 9-11* (FRLANT, 86; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,

standard biblical and Jewish conception of election with no evidence in the New Testament that its orientation had changed. Quite to the contrary, it presents Christ as the true Israel in whom is fulfilled the election of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the covenant people of God, and as the seed of Abraham to whom the covenant promises were made and in whom those promises are obtained for both Jews and Gentiles who believe. Moreover, the explicit language of election unto salvation is always corporate in the New Testament, continuing the approach of the Old. Furthermore, the socio-historical context of the New Testament authors was corporate in outlook. But having discussed these points elsewhere, and now having described the biblical concept of corporate election for the present article, we may now turn to a consideration of how the concept has been misunderstood and/or criticized with a view toward defending it. The misconceptions identified below apply either to misconception of corporate election or to what we regard as mistaken points or arguments against it.[14]

III.1. *Misconception # 1: Corporate Election Excludes Individuals*

Many scholars have assumed that the notion of corporate election excludes individuals from election, and therefore, in order to counter the view, go on to show how

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1964), 75-78.

[14] I will be interacting especially with Thomas Schreiner in this section because he is the advocate of individual election who has most fully addressed the concept of corporate election I am advancing. Cf. Klein's unpublished response to Schreiner in "Virtual Election?"

individuals are obviously elect and beneficiaries of election's blessings if the group they belong to is elect.[15] We have already invalidated this approach implicitly by the description of corporate election provided in the previous section. It is simply not true that the view excludes individuals; it includes individuals, but only insofar as they are part of the group. That is, it includes individuals based on their participation in the group/identification with the corporate representative.[16] Another way of saying this would be that the group is elected primarily and individuals secondarily. Corporate election begins with the individual corporate head and the group, and then moves to the individual. But it does arrive at the individual and allots a full and vigorous role to him in the context of community.

It is true that corporate election does not refer to the election of each individual separately from Christ or the group, but this does not in any way nullify the election of each individual member of the group as a result of the group's election. It is also true that corporate election does not refer to the choice of anyone to join the elect people. The

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[15] Thomas Schreiner's influential article is a prime example of this misconception, invalidating most of its arguments ("Reflections"); see note 4 above, and my response to Schreiner (Abasciano, "Election"). In his rejoinder, Schreiner continued to mischaracterize the position I have articulated, repeatedly claiming that individuals are not elected in it ("Response," 376-78, 382-84). See further under misconception # 3 below.

[16] Cf. William W. Klein, "Ephesians" in T. Longman III and D.E. Garland (eds.), *EBC* Rev., Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 19-173 (48).

concept of covenantal election or election unto eternal salvation simply does not apply to entrance into the elect people. It actually refers to a people being chosen to belong to God, to receive the benefits of his covenant promises (ideally),[17] and to live according to his covenant commands (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 4:20; 7:6-9; 14:2; Ps. 135:4; Eph. 1:4ff.; 1 Pet. 2:9-10). All of this applies to each individual in the New Covenant as a consequence of membership in the elect people, and more profoundly, of being in Christ by faith, which is what makes someone a part of God's people.

This misconception seems to lie behind John Piper's influential argument for individual election from Romans 9 based on the observation that Paul is concerned about the damnation of many individual Israelites within the chosen people, i.e., that despite being part of the physical chosen people, they are not truly elect, but excluded from God's true people and the salvation that belongs to them.[18] Now there are several serious problems with Piper's attempt to press this observation into service for establishing

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[17] In the Old Covenant, the covenant promises were conditional in that they could only be possessed by faith while the covenant generally included all Israelites, including the unbelieving. (Nevertheless, members of the covenant who demonstrated persistent unbelief by violating the covenant law without repentance were to be cut off.) But in the New Covenant, all in the covenant truly possess the promises because all in the New Covenant have faith since it is entered into by faith and believers only continue in the covenant by faith; if they forsake faith in Christ then they are cut off from the covenant.

[18] See Piper, *Justification*, esp. 64-67.

individualistic election in the passage.[19] But the one that concerns us now, and is itself fatal to his argument, is that the biblical concept of corporate election always encompassed the inclusion and exclusion of individuals with respect to the elect people without extending the concept of election itself to people joining or leaving the corporate body and without shifting the locus of election to the individual. To speak of individuals joining the elect people or being excluded from that people does not even suggest, much less establish, that election refers to God choosing individuals to become part of his people when it was a natural part of the concept to grant elect status to individuals as a consequence of membership in the group. In other words, Piper draws attention to language that was already a part of the corporate perspective to try and establish what

[19] See my critical assessment of Piper's argument (Abasciano, *Romans 9.1-9*, 183-89). Besides the problem discussed below, note that: (1) Piper relies on an unlikely translation of Rom. 9:6b to establish individualism in the passage; (2) even if his unlikely translation is correct, it tells against his case because the verse would be phrased even more corporately; (3) Piper begs the question of whether the individuals Paul is concerned about are viewed individualistically or corporately; (4) Piper begs the question of how the individual and corporate aspects of election relate, but appears to assume a non sequitur—that if the elect status of individuals is in view, then individualistic election must be too (see below).

amounts to a major shift in the concept to an individualistic perspective, leaving no credible basis for his argument.[20]

III.2. *Misconception # 2: Corporate Election Is Not the Election of People, but Merely the Election of an Empty Set*[21]

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[20] Therefore, Schreiner's reliance on Piper for establishing an individual referent for the singular language in Rom. 9 leaves his argument similarly baseless at this point ("Response," 382). It weakens it all the more that he doubly mischaracterizes my argument on singular language (Abasciano, "Election"): First he claims that I insist that all the singulars in Romans 9 must be interpreted corporately, when I in fact said almost the opposite, that reference to individuals fits comfortably into the corporate perspective, but that some of the individual language is best taken corporately (Abasciano, "Election," 358-59). Second, he claims that my view means no individuals are elected by God, and then attempts to knock down this straw man by referencing the election of the individual patriarchs (Schreiner, "Response," 383). On the individual election of the patriarchs, see below.

[21] For examples of this misconception, see Schreiner, "Response," 378, 386; Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian" in Brand (ed.), *Perspectives on Election*, 43-44, 46; idem, "Response to Pinnock," 316. In addition to the treatment provided here, see also Klein's refutation of this misconception ("Virtual Election?" 7-9).

This misconception follows naturally from the first and is simply not true for several reasons.

III.2.a. *The Corporate Head is the Group and Is Chosen First*

Above all, God first chooses the corporate head/representative so that there is never an empty set. Indeed, the corporate head is the foundation of the group and embodies the group in himself. To put it bluntly and in a way that undoubtedly rubs against individualistic sensibilities, the corporate head is the group, in accordance with the biblical principle of corporate solidarity. As 1 Cor. 12:12 puts it in relation to Christ, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though being many, are one body, *so also is Christ*."[22] Christ is both an individual and corporate figure. The group is chosen because of its association with him and because it shares in his election. His election extends to all those who are associated with him because they are *in him*. With the corporate head as the locus of election, there is never a time that the elect people is an empty set.[23]

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[22] All translations of Scripture in this article are mine unless otherwise noted; emphasis here mine.

[23] In conjunction with this misconception, Schreiner mischaracterizes my position again by describing it thus: "God chooses that there would be the Church of Jesus Christ. Then individuals choose to be part of this corporate group, i.e., the Church" ("Response", 378). But corporate election does not mean merely that God chooses that there will be a group. Rather, he chooses the corporate representative, and thereby any that will be found in

The corporate election of the Old Testament disproves the charge that the concept amounts to the election of merely an empty set, or at least it takes all bite out of the charge. For God's Old Testament people were chosen in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. Jacob was chosen in the womb, and at the very same time his descendants were chosen; they were chosen in him. "And the Lord said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb. And two peoples from your belly will be divided. And one people will be stronger than the other people. And the older will serve the younger' (Gen. 25:23). Notice how Jacob is wholly identified with his people before they exist. His election is their election; his destiny is their destiny. Indeed, they will be called by his personal name,

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him. Schreiner also argues that corporate election is only the election of an empty set based on the hypothetical possibility that no one chooses to believe in Christ, for if no one believed, then there would be no group to be saved (ibid). But this extension of the argument falls on the same point of election being founded and focused on the corporate head. It can also be shown to falter by practical example. In the case of the corporate election of Rahab's household (see under misconception # 3 below) e.g., even if no one in Rahab's family agreed to join her in her house when Israel attacked Jericho, that would not change the fact that the family was indeed elected for salvation, and that corporately and not individualistically; the election of the family for salvation did not entail the choice of each member separately to become a member of the family or to be related to Rahab. Beyond that, it is artificial to appeal to a hypothetical here. That is not how it in fact is, and God knew how it would be.

whether Jacob or Israel. Both are designations for the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

Was Israel an empty set when Jacob was chosen? One might argue so. But then that would prove too much. It would constitute an argument against the concept of the election of God's people found in the Old Testament as somehow not really the election of people. For Israel was chosen in Jacob. That is, the people Israel was chosen as a consequence of the man Israel's election. When he was chosen, they were chosen. As Gen. 25:23 indicates, it could be said that the nation was in Rebekah's womb because Jacob was. And as Mal. 1:2-3 affirms, God loved/chose the people Israel by loving/choosing Jacob. The author of Hebrews could even depict Levi as having paid tithes on some level before he was born because Abraham paid tithes; i.e., he paid tithes in Abraham (Heb. 7:9-10).

Thus, while it might be the tendency of an individualistic viewpoint to look at the people of God as a nullity when only the corporate representative of the people is actually in the covenant, it is not the biblical view. Nor is it the view likely to be taken in a collectivist culture such as the ones in which the Old and New Testaments were written, which viewed the group as primary and the individual as secondary.[24] The individualistic viewpoint does not account for the principle of corporate solidarity that is so at home in the Bible and collectivist thought. In biblical thought, the corporate representative would

[24] On the collectivist worldview that served as the milieu for the biblical authors and its significance for election, see Abasciano, "Election", esp. 356-358; idem, *Romans 9.1-9*, 41-44, 187; and the literature cited in these works.

be seen as embodying the people he represents from the beginning of his representative role, which is to say from the beginning of his election.

As we have shown, there is never an empty set with corporate election. This would be true even of the church's election before the foundation of the world because that election was in Christ, consequent on his election, which is foundational to the election of his people in his capacity as their corporate representative (Eph. 1:4). We will turn to Eph. 1:4 shortly; but before doing so, it is worth noting that the church's election is the fulfillment of Israel's election. More specifically, in the New Testament Christ is viewed as the true Israel, and therefore the Church is also considered to be the true Israel because it is in Christ (see Section II above).

This renders the claim that a primarily corporate election is merely abstract even more hollow than it has already been shown to be by the concrete election of the corporate head, because the Church's election is already rooted in the concrete corporate election of Old Testament Israel. After all, as we have already mentioned, those who believe in Christ are grafted into the people of God, which is rooted in the election of the Old Testament patriarchs (Rom. 11:17-24), and Gentile believers get incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel, becoming fellow citizens in Israel and fellow members of the household of God (Eph. 2:11-22; note esp. vv. 12 and 19). This is actually the significance of the concept of foreknowledge that occasionally pops up around the concept of election (Rom. 8:29; 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). When God's people are its object, it is not that foreknowledge refers to foreseen faith, but prior acknowledgement of a people as

God's covenant partner.[25] When the Church is said to be foreknown, the reason for mentioning it is to emphasize the Church's continuity with the historic and legitimate covenant people of God so as to legitimize it and affirm its genuine status as the present covenant people and heir to the covenant promises of God.

III.2.b. *The Significance of Ephesians 1:4*

The misconception that a primarily corporate election does not involve the actual election of people figures into criticisms leveled against the use of Eph. 1:4 by advocates of corporate election ("insofar as he [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love"). It is urged that the text states that God chose people ("us") rather than a category or a class.[26] However, as we have seen, a proper view of corporate election does not exclude the election of individuals. It simply insists that the election of individuals comes to them as part of the elect people. Each individual member of the elect people is personally elect, but only as a consequence of his membership in the elect people, and ultimately, only as a consequence of his identification with the corporate head. This eliminates the objection that corporate election is somehow not the election of people or that it does not allow election to apply personally to individuals.

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[25] For elective knowledge as acknowledgment of covenant partnership, see Abasciano, *Romans 9.1-9*, 62-63.

[26] See e.g., Ware, "Election," 44-45; cf. Schreiner, "Reflections," 36-38.

Peter O'Brien lodges this sort of objection to a primarily corporate election, pointing out that some of the divine blessings mentioned in Ephesians 1 "must be understood as coming to believers personally and individually."[27] From what has been said, it should be more than evident that such objections are mistaken. In O'Brien's case, it even leads him to contradict what he recognizes to be the significance of the "in Christ" phrase in 1:3—that the blessings of the heavenly realm which believers receive "come not only through the agency of Christ but also because the recipients are incorporated in him who is himself in the heavenly realm."[28] The logic of this view of the "in Christ" phrase flows simply and straightforwardly into the very next verse's affirmation of election *in him*, one of the many blessings enumerated in Eph. 1:4-13, all of which surely fall under the rubric of 1:3's summary phrase, "every spiritual blessing." If every spiritual blessing comes to believers because they are in Christ, and election is one of those

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[27] O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 99. Contrast Klein in speaking of the corporate view of election in Eph. 1:4: "This is not to deny that election is personal: certainly every member of the church shares its election" ("Ephesians," 48).

[28] Ibid, 97; Andrew T. Lincoln uses almost the same language of the meaning of the phrase (*Ephesians* [WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990], 22). This same sort of contradiction can be seen in other Calvinist commentators who recognize the obvious meaning of the "in Christ" phrase in 1:1 and 1:3, but then ignore or unsuccessfully try to escape its force in 1:4; see e.g., Harold Hoehner *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 143, 171-72, 176-77; William Hendriksen, *Galatians and Ephesians* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 70-71, 75-76.

blessings, then it follows necessarily that believers are elect because they are in Christ. Election is conditional upon being in Christ by faith. It is only theological and individualistic presupposition that would insist that the same "in Christ" phrase that indicated that every spiritual blessing comes to believers as a consequence of union with Christ somehow does not mean that the spiritual blessing of election comes to believers as a consequence of union with Christ.

Advocates of corporate election observe that the election of the Church, viewed corporately in Eph. 1:4 in the plural reference to "us" (ἡμᾶς),[29] is qualified as being in

[29] It is typical for commentators to take this reference to be of the Christian Church generally as the people of God; for several representative references, see Hoehner *Ephesians*, 176 n. 1. Hoehner himself, however, argues that the reference is not collective since "Paul would not have used the singular pronoun, for he was not writing to an individual but to the church as a whole" (176). But that is part of the point—Paul was addressing the church as a whole (I would say churches as wholes); he was addressing the church corporately. Therefore, his plural reference is best taken of the church as a whole, especially as it was uttered in a collectivist cultural milieu in which the group was seen as primary and the individual as secondary, embedded in the group to which he belonged and referred to as a result of his membership in the group. Curiously, Hoehner thinks the reference refers only to Paul and the Ephesian church. But this is highly unlikely. As O'Brien observes, "the flow of the paragraph and the nature of the divine gifts being described show that the apostle has all of God's people in mind" (*Ephesians*, 96, on 1:3, though O'Brien thinks that God's people are in view both corporately and

Christ. The election of Christ is here assumed, and he is envisioned as the sphere of election. It is much the same as the use of the "in x" language found in Paul's quotation of Gen. 21:12 in Rom. 9.7, where the context also concerns election: "in Isaac your seed will be named." In Gen. 21:12, God tells Abraham how his descendants will be identified—by relationship to Isaac. Those who are connected to Isaac will be named as Abraham's seed, and therefore as covenant heirs. In other words, they will be named as

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individually; cf. p. 99 on 1:4;). This finds support in the fact that the blessings Paul enumerates in Eph. 1 apply to all Christians. Indeed, Ephesians tends to discussion of general Christian realities applicable to all Christians in which the readers participate. See e.g., O'Brien's discussion of the recipients of the letter, who notes that "a number of the images and metaphors used of these Christian readers are corporate and describe them in terms of their belonging to a wider community of men and women in Christ" (ibid, 49-51; quotation from p. 50). This is further supported by the likelihood that Ephesians was a circular letter intended for various churches in Asia Minor; see again e.g. O'Brien, ibid, 47-49. That Paul is thinking of all Christians, and that his use of "us" does not merely reflect inclusion of himself alone with his addressees, is shown by his distinction between "we . . . who were the first to hope in Christ"(1:12), most likely referring to early Jewish Christians, and "you also," most likely referring to Paul's predominantly Gentile Christian audience; on the distinction, see again O'Brien, ibid, 116-17 (though I would take the "we" of v. 11 of all Christians, with v. 12 highlighting the result [taking εἰς τὸ εἶναι to indicate result] of v. 11 for early Jewish Christians).

God's covenant people as a consequence of their relationship with Isaac.[30] Paul interprets this to mean, "it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as seed" (Rom. 9:7), which is a way of saying that believers are regarded as Abraham's seed, heirs of God's promises to him, the very thing Paul argued in Romans 4.

As Paul put it in Gal. 3:26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." The following verses are illuminating for this topic as well: "For as many of you

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[30] Schreiner severely mischaracterizes this point as I made it in a previous article when he retorts that "Paul argues *against* this view in Romans 9, when he states that mere biological descent from Abraham *does not* mean that one is part of the covenant people (Rom 9:6-13)" ("Response," 382). Paul interprets this fact of calling based on relationship to Isaac spiritually in Rom. 9 and I state this explicitly in the very next sentence of the original context from which Schreiner quoted me. Strikingly, in the context of Romans and the Pauline corpus, to be a child of promise is to have faith (see Abasciano, *Romans 9.1-9*, 196-98). While there is even more to the phrase's meaning, Paul's statement means that those who believe are regarded as the seed of Abraham, as Paul argues in Romans and elsewhere. Schreiner is completely correct that Paul states that "mere biological descent from Abraham *does not* mean that one is part of the covenant people (Rom 9:6-13)." But what Paul is stressing, in conformity to the whole tenor of his argument in Romans, is that faith does mean that one is part of the covenant people. Schreiner has grossly misread my argument here and so failed to see that the case of Isaac he cites fully supports my view and militates against his own.

as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ,[31] then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:27-29). Notice how the thoughts coalesce. Being sons of God is by faith, and this is elaborated on as being clothed with Christ in baptism, the typical time of the formal expression of faith. Further elaboration draws out the consequence of faith—"you are all one *in Christ Jesus*." Believing in Jesus brings one to be clothed with Christ, which is a way of speaking of being united with him or being in him. As a result of union with him by faith, one becomes God's child, leading to oneness with Christian brothers and sisters. Both sonship and union with Christ could be said to provide for oneness with fellow Christians, sonship because of membership in the same family, and union because of incorporation into the same person, the corporate head (cf. e.g., Eph. 2:11-22, where unity among believers and incorporation into the household of God the Father is predicated on being in Christ, in whom Jewish and Gentile believers have been made into one new man). This leaves sonship and membership in Christ as roughly synonymous, two sides of the same coin, though it is best to take the latter as the basis of the former. Then, the notion of belonging to Christ appears as another roughly equivalent concept. It seems to be tied most closely to being in Christ, which immediately precedes it in the text. Indeed, it would seem to be a corollary of being in Christ. Becoming united to Christ also brings one to belong to him (i.e., to be elect) just as it makes one a part of Christ and a son of God, all of which is by faith. Finally, this is

[31] Lit. "And if you are of Christ"

all tied to heirship as well. Most specifically, belonging to Christ brings about heirship according to promise, a concept that cannot be separated from sonship, which also brings about heirship.

In any case, the statement of Gen. 21:12/Rom. 9:7 clearly presupposes Isaac's election/calling as the covenant head, and asserts his descendants' calling as a consequence of their relationship to him. The very structure of the "chosen/called in Isaac/Christ" phraseology indicates a choice of people conditioned on relationship to the covenant head, who was chosen first and whose election provides the basis of the election of his people. Hence, God's election of the Church in Eph. 1:4 is presented as a consequence of their union with Christ, the Chosen One. Their election is intrinsic to his just as the election of Israel (the people) was intrinsic to the election of Israel (the covenant head) before the nation ever existed. As Andrew Lincoln observes, the early Church, in continuity with the Old Testament, had a

> consciousness of being chosen to be the people of God. . . Their sense of God's gracious choice of them was inextricably interwoven with their sense of belonging to Christ. They saw him as God's Chosen One . . . Indeed, Paul in Gal 3 treats Christ as in a sense fulfilling Israel's election. Christ is the offspring of Abraham *par excellence* (3:16), and in Christ the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles (3:14) so that they too, because they are Christ's, are Abraham's offspring (3:29).[32]

[32] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 23. Cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians* (Vol. 1; AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974), 107-09; F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 254.

And as F.F. Bruce succinctly states in relation to the "in Christ" phrase of 1:4, Christ "is the Chosen One of God *par excellence*."[33] The point is confirmed in Eph. 1:6, which refers to Christ as the Beloved (τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ) in whom God's grace has been lavished on us (the Church/believers), a term that signifies Christ as the Chosen One, most likely grounded in the title's use as a designation of God's chosen people in the Old Testament (LXX Deut. 32:15; 33:5, 12, 26; Isa. 5:1, 7; 44:2; Jer. 11:15; 12:7) and in the elective significance of love terminology in the Old Testament (e.g., Mal. 1:2), terminology that carries over into the New Testament in application to Christ (Col. 1:13; Mark 1:11; 9:7 and parallels; Mark 12:6; Luke 20:13) and the Church (1 Thes. 1:4; 2 Thes. 2:13; Rom. 9:25; Col. 3:12) in various texts.[34]

In the case of Eph. 1:4, Christ is presented as existing before the foundation of the world and chosen by God as the head of his people and the heir to all of his blessings. All those who come to be in Christ then necessarily come to share in his election, identity, and inheritance. What is true of Christ the covenant head also becomes true of those who are in him. He is the Son of God, so they are sons of God (Gal. 3:26). He is holy, so they

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[33] Bruce, ibid.

[34] On the term as indicating Christ as the Chosen One, see esp. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 26-27; cf. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 104-05; Bruce, *Ephesians*, 258; most of the cited Scripture references were culled from these sources. On the elective significance of OT love terminology, see the treatment of Rom. 9:13 in my forthcoming monograph in T & T Clark's LNTS series (tentatively titled *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9.10-18: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis*).

become holy (Col. 3:12; 1 Cor 3:17; Eph 2:19-22), indeed holy ones (ἅγιοι, e.g. Eph. 1:1; cf. references to Jesus as the Holy One, 1 Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 2:27; 13:35; 1 John 2:20). He is beloved, so they are beloved (Eph. 1:6; 5:1). He is righteous, so they are righteous (Rom. 3:22); indeed they are the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21) and have been justified in him (Gal. 2:17). He is heir to all the promises of God, and they are heirs with him (Rom. 4:13-17; 8:16-17; Gal. 3:29). He has died, risen, and been seated in the heavenlies, and they have died, risen, and been seated with him and in him (Eph. 2:4-7; Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 2:11-13). He has been given the Spirit, and so therefore they have been given the Spirit as well, who is the bestower and marker of election (Eph 1:13-14; Acts 2:33; Gal. 3:2-5; Rom 8:1 [note how this glorious chapter begins as a depiction of what is true for those *in Christ*], 9-11, 14-17).[35] His death is their death. His resurrection is their resurrection. His life is their life. All of this is contingent on being in Christ, which is itself contingent on faith in Christ, a point underscored by the fact that some of the key blessings just mentioned are explicitly said to be by faith, namely sonship (and therefore heirship), righteousness/justification, the giving of the Spirit, and life/resurrection.

Even though personal possession of these benefits actually applies to people only when they become united with Christ by faith, in principle it can be said that they were given to "us" (believers/Christians/God's people) when they were given to Christ, because he, as the corporate head of his people, embodies the people as a corporate entity

[35] On the Spirit as the bestower and marker of election, see Abasciano, *Romans 9.1-9*, 124-26.

from the very moment of his election as the corporate head, just as we saw that it could be said that the nation of Israel was in the womb of Rebekah because Jacob was (Gen. 25:23) and that God loved/chose Israel by loving/choosing Jacob (Mal. 1:2-3) and that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham (Heb. 7:9-10). This is somewhat similar to how I, as an American, can say that we (America) won the Revolutionary War before I or any American alive today was ever born.

We find such a conceptualization in, for example, Eph. 2:5-6 in conjunction with the language of being "in Christ": "even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (ESV; cf. Col. 2:11-14; Rom 6:1-14). When believers come to be in Christ by faith, they come to share in his history, identity, and destiny. Therefore it can be said that they died and rose with him even though they did not die or rise with him literally when he did. It may be even more striking that Paul says that we were seated with Christ in the heavenlies in Christ, for neither Paul nor his audience was literally in the heavenlies when Paul wrote, not to mention when Christ was first seated there. But Christ is the corporate head and representative of his people, a corporate entity that transcends the mere collection of its individual members and their individual identities, as is also evident in the case of nations and many other significant corporate entities.[36] Therefore, it can be said that we (the

[36] See Abasciano for this point and some exploration of it in the case of a professional baseball team ("Election," 364-66). My consideration of the purchase of a baseball team was in response to Schreiner's misguided attempt to use the analogy to argue for

individualistic election (“Reflections,” 37). Closer attention to the choice of a baseball team for purchase (a corporate election) reveals it to illustrate the concept of a primarily corporate election quite nicely. If one buys a baseball team, one does not individually choose each player one wants to put on the team and individually “buy” each player, thus making up the team. Rather, each individual player on the team is bought/chosen as a consequence of his membership on the team. And in fact, members of the team can come and go from one day to another, yet the team continues to exist and its identity remains the same. Surprisingly, Schreiner faults me for assuming that the group (the “baseball team”) already exists when God chooses it (“Response,” 378-79). But I was responding to *his* illustration, which clearly assumed that the team already existed, for he offered the idea of someone purchasing a professional baseball team. But in response to a change in the illustration to the formation of a new baseball team, it may be pointed out that his analogy still fails, because in the case of biblical election unto salvation, the “team” did exist first in that God first chose Christ, and the Church in him. As the corporate head, Christ’s election is the election of a people, of whoever will come to be identified with him. He represents and embodies the team in himself, and anyone who comes to be in him comes to share in his election; see more above in the present section. Incidentally, in the corporate context of professional baseball, a team can actually exist before it has any members, a fact I pointed out but that Schreiner ignored (see Abasciano, “Election,” 365 n. 49). Klein relates the fact that the *Colorado Rockies* existed as a baseball team before it ever had a manager or any players (“Virtual Election?” 7-9). The team had a name, season tickets were sold, and players were solicited to join the team.

Church, Christians) are seated in the heavenlies because Christ is in the heavenlies and we are in him, which identifies us with him and he with us.[37] By the same principle of corporate solidarity it can be said that we were chosen in Christ *before the foundation of*

[37] This is similar to saying that we (America) are seated at the negotiation table with other countries discussing terms of peace because the President or our ambassador is, or that we (unionized workers) are seated at the negotiation table with our employer for the purpose of obtaining a raise because our union representative is, though these modern analogies set in an individualistic culture cannot do justice to the even more profound connection between the group and its head in the perception of the collectivist culture of Paul and early Christianity. Cf. e.g., the corporate perspective of Deut., which according to J.G. McConville, has as one of its main contentions that Israel in all its generations stood in principle at Horeb (*Deuteronomy* [AOTC 5; Leicester: Apollos; Downer's Grove: IVP, 2002], 124). Indeed, all Israel is referred to as having experienced the Lord and the events surrounding the exodus even though most of the nation presented as alive at the time of Moses' address to them were not alive to experience those events. In a particularly striking example, we are told, "YHWH our God cut a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our fathers did YHWH cut this covenant, but with we ourselves here today, all of us alive" (Deut. 5:2-3). How can it be said that the covenant was made with "all of us" at Horeb if most of "us" were not alive to enter into that covenant at Horeb? By the principle of corporate solidarity and identity, which bring individuals to share in the corporate reality, history, and destiny of the people as a consequence of identification with the group.

the world. The expression does not mean that we were somehow literally pre-existent before the foundation of the world, nor that we were *merely* pre-existent in the mind or plan of God, nor that God foreknew our faith and chose us on that basis, but that, "The election of Christ, the pre-existent corporate head of the Church, before the foundation of the world entails the election of the Church because he is the corporate head and representative of the Church, and what is true of him as their representative is also true of them, his body."[38]

Some interpreters have attempted to deny the incorporative sense of the "in him [Christ]" phrase in Eph. 1:4, but the evidence and the weight of scholarship is against them.[39] In fact, Schreiner appeared to argue against the incorporative meaning in his influential article in favor of individualistic election unto salvation, advocating an

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[38] Abasciano, "Election," 367. It is of course true in the biblical view that God knew of us and our future existence before we came into existence and that he knew who would exercise faith before their existence, but neither of these is likely the specific meaning of Eph. 1:4's statement that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, for the choosing is specifically qualified as being in Christ, the meaning of which we have been laboring to unpack. It should go without saying that the text does not consider the Church or individual believers to have literally existed before the foundation of the world.

[39] See Klein and the references he provides to those who support a corporate view of election here that rests on an incorporative sense ("Ephesians," 48, 56); O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 97-100; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 21-24.

instrumental sense, but then conceded the point in a later article when challenged with the actual evidence of Ephesians in

> the obviously incorporative significance of the same language elsewhere in Ephesians, such as the identification of Christ as the head of the Church/his body (1:20–23), the raising up/new creation of the Church in Christ (2:6–10; cf. the similarity of 2:6 and 1:3 with their language of "the heavenlies"!), and the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into Christ as one new man/body/temple (2:11–22) to name just a few examples.[40]

Harold Hoehner, whom we earlier noted to acknowledge the incorporative sense of the phrase in Eph. 1:1 and 1:3, serves as another example of an interpreter who attempts to deny the incorporative sense of the "in Christ" phrase in Eph. 1:4. After mentioning a few options for the phrase's meaning that have been suggested but he deems implausible on questionable grounds, Hoehner identifies two more that he thinks are really possible: (1) an incorporative sense, which he labels a dative of sphere, relating to Christ's identity as the head and representative of God's people, or (2) an instrumental sense, specifically referring to Christ's work of redemption as the means through which believers are chosen.[41] "This latter interpretation," says Hoehner, "is preferable because it expresses

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[40] Abasciano ("Election," 367), responding to Schreiner's original position ("Reflections," 38); cf. Schreiner's revised position ("Response," 380). It should be noted that the incorporative sense of the phrase also implies an instrumental sense, though the reverse is not necessarily true.

[41] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 176-77. The other options Hoehner identifies are election (1) through faith in Christ; (2) as a consequence of being in Christ the Elect One; or (3)

that God chose the believer for his glory and that it had to be done in connection with the redemption accomplished in Christ. God cannot bring sinful humans into his presence forever without Christ having paid for sin."[42]

Hoehner's reasoning does not provide good support for his position. First, it is not clear why indicating a purpose of God's glory should be thought necessary in Eph. 1:4 specifically. But second, it is not at all clear how an instrumental sense related to Christ's work of redemption is any more glorifying to God than an incorporative sense related to Christ's headship and representation of God's people, which after all actually includes his work of redemption as well. Third, while it may be true that sin must be paid for to make

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according to divine foreknowledge of human faith. His reasoning against each of these options is rather weak. Concerning (1), his reasoning is theological and presuppositional, and faulty on even these non-exegetical points. It verges on nonsensical to say that God electing on a basis that he himself chooses somehow destroys his freedom of choice. Nor is it apparent that God freely choosing to elect based on faith would give believers a legal claim on God, and if it did so, how it would do so in any way unconditional election would not. Concerning (3), Hoehner is right to observe that it claims more than the passage says, but this weighs against his own view (see below). Moreover, it is hard to see how election according to God's good pleasure (Eph. 1:5) necessarily conflicts with certain other potential bases of election. Specifically, if God freely chose faith as the criterion of his selection, then how can it be said that his choice would not also be according to his good pleasure? On (2), see below.

[42] Ibid, 177.

it possible for sinful humans to enter God's presence, there is no reason to assume that this specific idea must be alluded to in Eph. 1:4. But if it must be so, then the incorporative sense accomplishes this too since it would make plain that sinful humans need a representative to bring them into God's presence.

Fourth, there is no real contextual reason to think that Christ's work of redemption is specifically in view in the passage. The idea is not mentioned to this point. In Hoehner's own words against the suggestion that God's foreknowledge of human faith is the significance of the phrase, "This suggests more than the passage claims."[43] It is true that redemption is mentioned in 1:7, but it is presented as just another of the blessings given *in Christ* to believers, just as election itself is. There is no hint that redemption is itself more intimately connected to being in Christ than any of the other blessings granted in him.[44] Fifth, Hoehner accepts the incorporative sense of the "in Christ" phrase in 1:1

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[43] Ibid.

[44] If one were to argue that redemption makes it possible to be in Christ, then that would invite the observation that faith is the means by which that redemption is applied and by which one comes to be in Christ, and that believing is specifically mentioned in 1:13, which is part of the same long sentence in which 1:4 lies, with the incorporation of Paul's Gentile readers into Christ and their being marked as belonging to God coming specifically into view at the very place that faith is mentioned and indicated as the means by which believers are sealed in Christ. This would make faith as the means by which believers are elected or divine foreknowledge of human faith both more likely

and 1:3.[45] Yet if one accepts an incorporative significance for the "in Christ" phrase in 1:3, it is almost impossible to deny reasonably the same basic sense in 1:4, as discussed earlier in relation to O'Brien's position. Indeed, Hoehner himself acknowledges that the "in him" of 1:4 "refers back to 'in Christ' in verse 2 [sic]."[46]

It is surprising that Hoehner separates the incorporative view from the view that the "in Christ" phrase involves the election of Christ as the basis of the election of believers,[47] for they are in fact intertwined as can be seen in our discussion so far. It is because of Christ's election that incorporation into him entails the extension of his election to those who are so united to him. Being in Christ entails sharing in his history, identity, inheritance, and destiny. But Hoehner insists that Christ's election as the basis of the election of believers is not in view "because the object of the verb 'chose' is 'us' and not 'Christ'."[48] However, this type of response does not rightly grapple with what is being claimed by the incorporative view. The idea is not that Eph. 1:4 represents Christ as elect rather than believers, but that it refers directly to the election of believers with the

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connotations of the "in Christ" phrase (in relation to election) than redemption. But none of these are as likely as the incorporative sense widely recognized in 1:3.

[45] Ibid, 143, 171-72.

[46] Ibid, 176. Hoehner's reference to v. 2 must be a mistake, and refer to v. 3, since "in Christ" does not appear in 1:2.

[47] Ibid, 176-77.

[48] Ibid, 177, 192; cf. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 99 n. 53.

"in Christ" phrase qualifying this election as being conditioned on believers' union with Christ, the Chosen One.

Similarly to Hoehner, Schreiner has argued not only for the instrumental sense of the "in Christ" phrase (noted above), but also that the election of Christ is not of any real significance in the verse, pointing out that, "the text does not specifically say that Christ was elected. The object of the verb 'chose' is 'us' in Eph 1:4."[49] But when faced with the obviously incorporative sense of the "in Christ" phrase in Eph 1:4, he has conceded that the election of Christ is part of the meaning and background of the verse.[50] But he maintains that the emphasis "is not on the election of Christ, but the election of human beings," since "in Eph 1:4 human beings are the direct object of God's election, not Jesus Christ."[51]

However, Schreiner's position is problematic. It is not that he is incorrect to say that "in Eph 1:4 human beings are the direct object of God's election, not Jesus Christ."[52] But the significance Schreiner wants to assign to this—unconditional individualistic

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[49] Schreiner, "Reflections," 37.

[50] Schreiner, "Response," 380, responding to Abasciano, "Election," 366-67.

[51] Schreiner, "Response," 380.

[52] Ibid. But I take this to mean that Eph. 1:4 explicitly speaks of the election of human beings, and not of Jesus Christ. If, as Schreiner concedes, the verse has Jesus' election in the background, then it certainly is his direct election by the Father that is implied. The point is that Eph. 1:4 implies this direct election of Jesus Christ and does not state it explicitly.

election—is contradicted by the fact that the election of human beings is directly qualified in the verse by the phrase "in him," which indicates the sphere and manner of the election of the human beings mentioned. The meaning of the "in him [Christ]" phrase is exactly that the Church is chosen as a consequence of being in Christ. It is a matter of unpacking the meaning of the phrase, which tells how God chose believers. Part of its meaning in this context is that God chose Christ as the corporate head, and then the election of the Church results from his election, because the Church is in him, and therefore what is true of him is true of them. As already mentioned, Schreiner now admits that the election of Christ is part of the background and meaning of the verse. It would violate standard exegetical procedure, therefore, to close our eyes to its import for the meaning of the text. So proponents of corporate election do not emphasize an unstated matter as Schreiner charges.[53] It is stated in the "in Christ" phrase, which is heavily emphasized in the context.[54]

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[53] Ibid. Schreiner also cites Eph. 1:5 as opposing the corporate view based on its affirmation "that God 'predestined us *according to the purpose of his will*' " (translation and emphasis his). But it is not clear how predestination being in accordance with the kind intention/purpose (a better translation of εὐδοκία, though it makes little difference for my point) of God's will contradicts God conditioning the benefit intended by that will on being in Christ; see note 41 above. Indeed, predestination itself is said to be through Christ in 1:5, which in the context of the incorporative idea in 1:3 and 1:4, most likely means that predestination to adoption is through Christ precisely because believers are in him. In other words, because election in Christ necessarily entails election through Christ

But it is even inaccurate to say that Arminian interpreters emphasize the election of Christ over the election of human beings in Eph. 1:4. They merely point out the meaning of the words that actually stand in the text. The question is not, "what does it mean to say that God chose us?", but, "what does it means to say that God chose us in Christ?" A critical part of the answer to that is provided by the incorporative, qualifying phrase, "in Christ." It means that God chose us as a consequence of being in Christ. There is no denial here of the election of human beings, just that the election of human beings is individualistic and unconditional. To sum it up succinctly, Calvinists tend to

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as the sphere, and so the means, through which believers are chosen, then predestination through Christ in this context is roughly equivalent to predestination in Christ in an incorporative sense. This is confirmed again by 1:3, which speaks incorporatively of God having blessed the Church with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Surely predestination is one of the spiritual blessings comprehended in every spiritual blessing of 1:3, which 1:4-14 enumerates.

[54] "In Christ" or its equivalents that is. As MacDonald says, "In a unit of twelve verses (1:3-14) there are as many *foci on Christ* as there are verses. He is the one in whom and through whom 'every spiritual blessing' proceeds. His diagrammatic centrality is evident and necessary to the doctrine. One must not talk about election without mentioning Christ in every breath" ("Election," 222). The "in Christ" phrase itself or its equivalent occurs some eleven times in 1:3-14. Or as O'Brien mentions, there is a "constant repetition of the phrase" (*Ephesians*, 90). As Lincoln's puts it, the phrase and its equivalents "predominate" in the passage (*Ephesians*, 19).

interpret Eph. 1:4 as saying that God chose us separately and individually to be put into Christ, to which Arminians quickly respond that what the text actually says is that God chose us in Christ.

III.3. *Misconception # 3: The Concept of a Primarily Corporate Election Is Illogical*

Schreiner has led the charge for this misconception in modern scholarship.[55] Indeed, it is a crucial basis of his position. But it is untenable. Happily, Schreiner acknowledges that I understand his position. But I must say that he does not seem to understand mine (corporate election). I suspect that this is largely due to his individualistic and Calvinistic presuppositions. Assuming his own view, he cannot see that being elected as part of a group that is chosen to receive some benefit is still being chosen for that benefit, but he essentially insists that one is chosen for a benefit only if that same choice also elects one to join the group. I.e., one can be chosen for a benefit only if that election applies to entrance into the group that is chosen for that benefit. But this is an egregious non sequitur that can be easily refuted by logic and any number of examples from the Bible and everyday life. Surely a group, and hence its members, can be elected for some purpose or benefit without necessitating that the same choice also elects each individual member to become part of the group.

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[55] See Schreiner, "Reflections"; idem, "Response." Cf. Klein's response ("Virtual Election?" 7-12) and esp. my criticism of Schreiner's position as that position appears in "Reflections" (Abasciano, "Election").

We have already outlined how the election of the people of God in the Old Testament was a matter of primarily corporate rather than individualistic election. And we have noted a very practical example of primarily corporate election from the modern world in the case of choosing/buying a professional baseball team (see note 36 above). We could multiply examples, but will content ourselves with just two more. Consider the case of the salvation of Rahab and her household from the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 2 and 6) mentioned earlier (note 23 above).[56] Because she helped the Israelite spies, Rahab elicited the promise from them to spare her and anyone in her house at the time of the attack. Anyone found with her in the house would be spared. The Israelites' selection of who would be spared was corporate in that it was focused on an individual whose election was primary and extended to anyone attached to her. She was chosen for salvation, and then the group with her in the house was also chosen. If someone were to ask one of her brothers' children, for example, why the child was chosen to be spared, then the child could respond legitimately in any number of ways that affirm that the child was chosen for salvation (e.g., "my aunt Rahab helped some Israelite spies, and so your people decided to spare her family"). But the important thing to be grasped for the present discussion is that the child was not chosen for salvation individualistically, but he

[56] This is not a case of election unto spiritual salvation, but we are countering the claim that primarily corporate election is illogical; any example of the phenomenon will do to falsify denial of its existence. If the example holds, then election unto spiritual salvation is possible on the level of logic mutatis mutandis. The same goes for any examples of corporate election that are not salvific.

was chosen nonetheless. He was not chosen separately from Rahab or his family by the Israelites to become part of Rahab's family or the group gathered in Rahab's house on the day of Israel's attack. But he was chosen for salvation from death as a consequence of association with Rahab and being in Rahab's house on that fateful day. But Schreiner would have us believe that this is logically impossible.

Or we can consider the case of the determination of who had sinned and brought trouble upon Israel by taking things from Ai that had been banned (Josh. 7:10-18). The procedure for identifying the culprit involved several instances of corporate election: "You [Israel] will be brought near by your tribes in the morning; and it will be that the tribe which YHWH selects by lot will come near by clans, and the clan which YHWH selects by lot will come near by households, and the household which YHWH selects by lot will come near by man" (Josh. 7:14). Finally, one man would be selected by lot, and the culprit would be made known. That final step would indeed be a case of individual election. But first, there would be cases of corporate election—tribes, clans, and households.

When the tribe of Judah was chosen to come near to the Lord, it was not that each individual member of the tribe was chosen separately on his own to come near to the Lord, and then this made up the tribe coming near after each member had individually been chosen. That would have taken quite a long time! Nor did the choice of Judah by lot mean that at the time it was selected by lot each member of the tribe was separately and individually selected to be part of the tribe. That would not only also take an incredible amount of time, but the idea of the choice of any one member to become part of the tribe

is a totally separate matter from the tribe's being chosen to draw near to the Lord.[57] But these are the very types of implications Schreiner ironically argues that logic demands when a group is said to be chosen, while maintaining that it is logically impossible for an individual to experience election as a consequence of membership in a group as we have seen so clearly in the procedure recorded in Joshua 7.

This is why I am forced to conclude that Schreiner's individualistic presuppositions are blinding him to the *possibility* of the corporate view, and that his position is therefore assumed and read into the text rather than drawn from it. It is not that he acknowledges the possibility of both the corporate and individual views. But one of his main arguments for individualistic election and against a primarily corporate election is that the latter is logically impossible. As I have shown here by concrete examples, which could be multiplied, it is nothing of the kind. Rather, it appears that it is the basis of Schreiner's position that is impossible.

Indeed, not only is Schreiner's claim of the logical impossibility of a primarily corporate election flatly denied by its existence in the Bible and everyday life, but it is also contradicted by the failure of his own individualistic view to account for corporate language that admits of some distinction between the group and its individual members.

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[57] Again, if a stranger were to ask a man from Judah why he (the individual) had been chosen to draw near to the Lord on this occasion, he could answer, "because my tribe was chosen by lot." Any individual man of Judah could be considered to have been chosen by lot to come forward, but he would only have been elected as part of the tribe that was elected corporately (and not individualistically).

Schreiner assumes that logic demands "a one-to-one correlation between the group and the individual so that what is true of the group is true of the individual in the exact same way. Therefore, for Schreiner, if the group has been selected, then this implies that each individual member of the group was selected on his own to become a member of the group."[58] But he acknowledges that, in Rom 9:30–10:21, "corporate Israel is not coextensive with those in Israel who believed,"[59] contradicting his foundational assumption. He tries to escape this contradiction by pointing to the nature of the Old Testament covenant community as both a political/theocratic entity and as a faith community, with not all members of the former participating in the latter.[60] But this does not adequately address the problem. For if we focus on the negative side of it, Rom. 9:30–10:21 still speaks of Israel as not believing. Yet believing Israelites were still part of ethnic Israel. Therefore, Paul speaks of corporate ethnic Israel as not believing even though some of corporate ethnic Israel did believe, demonstrating that there can be a difference between the group and individual in corporate thought, contradicting Schreiner's prime argument that such a difference is logically impossible.

The idea of a primarily corporate election is indeed logical, and the only way to explain certain instances of election. On the level of sheer logic, both individualistic and corporate election are possible. But when we examine the evidence for which type of

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[58] Abasciano, "Election," 370.

[59] Schreiner, "Response," 383 n. 19; see also idem, "Reflections," 34-35, and my criticism of the latter (Abasciano, "Election," 361-62).

[60] Schreiner, "Response," 383 n. 19.

election is found in the Bible with respect to the election of God's people unto eternal salvation, it is a primarily corporate election that is found. It will not do to try and bar consideration of the corporate view from the start by claiming it is logically impossible. Such a claim is indefensible, and its acceptance will only serve to blind us from valid potential options for interpreting the language of election and to foster the reading of individualistic assumptions into the text of Scripture, which was penned in a collectivist milieu.

III.4. *Misconception # 4: Corporate Election Empties Divine Election of Meaning and Makes Human Choice Decisive*

Schreiner has captured this line of argument as follows: "If the individual dimension of corporate election simply means that human beings believe in order to be saved, then there is no 'election' in corporate election. Or, to put it another way, there is no election by God. All the electing is done by the individual when he or she chooses to be saved."[61] But these comments are riddled with misconception. First and definitively, the premise that its reasoning is based on is false. The individual dimension of corporate election does *not* simply mean "that human beings believe in order to be saved." The individual dimension of election refers to the elect status of the individual and possession of the blessings of election by the individual as a result of God's choice of the group, just as it clearly did in the Old Testament for Israel, the people of God. It is another matter to ask what the basis of the individual's membership in the group is. That does not change

[61] Ibid, 376.

God's act of choosing the group, which serves as a second point of rebuttal to this misconception since God does indeed choose the group in corporate election, directly contradicting Schreiner's assertion.

Third, Schreiner's reasoning foists a predetermined hermeneutical conviction on the idea of election and what it has to be or involve, and then judges the corporate view by it rather than a more objective approach of trying to determine the biblical view and then assessing its implications. Indeed, this approach appears to keep its adherents from even understanding the corporate perspective properly.[62] In Schreiner's case, it appears to lead to the conclusion that in the corporate perspective, "at the end of the day God's choice of a corporate group saves no one,"[63] which shows a complete misunderstanding. The whole point is that in the corporate perspective, God's election of the group for salvation saves the members of the group.

What Schreiner really seems to be getting at here is that since corporate election makes individual election conditional upon being a member of the people of God, which is itself conditional upon being in Christ, which in turn is conditional on faith in Christ, then the individual's choice to believe becomes more important than God's choice of the individual for whether the person actually obtains salvation. This conclusion is unwarranted. But before exploring its merit, we should mark the theological presupposition at work in Schreiner's comments. He believes that human choice cannot play a decisive role in salvation, and then denies validity to a view that he perceives as

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[62] Hence the need for clearing up misconceptions.

[63] Ibid, 377.

giving such a role to human choice. But this is more of an argument from theological presupposition than from the text of Scripture.

My plea would be for us to draw our view of election from Scripture rather than deciding what its implications must be and then using our assessment of a view's implications to decide if Scripture can teach such a view. Perhaps we are wrong in our presuppositions.[64] Or perhaps we are incorrect about what a certain view really implies. If we discover that Scripture teaches a primarily corporate election unto salvation, then perhaps that will show either our presuppositions or our perception of the implications of corporate election to be wrong.

In this case, I believe that at least Schreiner's perception of the implications of corporate election is incorrect. I would argue that as far as election is concerned, it is the Savior and corporate elector who is decisive for the act of saving. For he is the one who has sovereignly planned, initiated, and executed the whole plan of salvation. He is the one who has sovereignly laid down the conditions for salvation, provided for salvation, and the one who actually saves. Without him, there absolutely can be no people or salvation. That he gives us a genuine choice in whether we will receive the salvation that he offers in the gospel is entirely in his control and at his discretion.

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[64] Cf. William W. Klein, "Exegetical Rigor with Hermeneutical Humility: The Calvinist-Arminian Debate and the New Testament" in A.M. Donaldson and T.B. Sailors (eds.), *New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Hawthorne* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 23-36.

The overarching point can be illustrated by any number of contexts in which a group, or even an individual, is chosen to receive some benefit conceived and initiated by another. Who is really to be seen as decisive in the benefit provided, the one who provides the benefit or the one who receives it? The one who chose the group to receive the benefit or the individual members of the group who chose to join the group? The most natural answer is that it is the provider of the benefit and the one who chose the group (or the individual) to receive the blessing. Yet there is also responsibility on each person for whether he enjoys the blessing by joining the group. It is the perfect scenario that upholds both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. It is the old point that a beggar can take no glory for receiving the blessing offered to him by the king. It provides for both God's primacy as the decisive party, yet man's responsibility as the one who must respond to the provision.

Schreiner's position is tantamount to saying that someone who has received an incredibly generous free gift can rightfully claim that he gave the gift to himself merely because he accepted it. The logic simply does not follow. There is no ground for saying that someone who chooses to accept a free gift actually gave the gift to himself rather than the giver having given it to him. The argument is false by definition (giver, receiver).

Consider this example from a modern instance of individual election. If a sports player (say football or baseball) is chosen in the draft, this is equivalent to individual election. Now the player has the choice to accept that team's offer for being part of the team and playing for them or not. But no one ever speaks of that player as choosing the

team or choosing himself. We always speak of it as the team drafting the player. The only thing that is typically thought to matter in the situation is the team's choice of the player, even though the player has to agree. Why? Because the player is receiving a great benefit. His ability to play in the league at that time is wholly dependent on the team's offer. He is utterly at their mercy if he wants to play in the league at that time.

Or consider another example, this time of corporate election. If a certain club is chosen by some exceedingly rich philanthropist to receive a continual supply of money for distribution among its members and to anyone who ever joins the group, would this mean that those who join the group give themselves the money by joining rather than the group's benefactor giving the group the money? Not at all. Indisputably, the giver of the money remains the one who gives the benefit. Nevertheless, those who refuse to join the group have only themselves to blame for not receiving the benefit offered by this generous benefactor.

One of the wonderful theological advantages of corporate election is that it comports with the Bible's teaching that God loves all, calls all to believe and be saved, and genuinely desires all to be saved (e.g., John 3:16; Acts 17:30-31; 1 Tim. 2:4). It reveals to us that God has made his loving intentions toward us clear. It magnifies his shockingly immense love and amazing grace. But that cannot determine the meaning of election for us. Its meaning must be drawn from what Scripture actually says about it rather than from the implications we would like it to have. Thankfully, on that score, the corporate view is the most strongly supported view.

III.5. *Misconception # 5: Election Unto Spiritual Salvation in the Old Testament Was Individualistic*

As one might expect from the last two misconceptions that we have addressed, some advocates of individualistic election unto salvation hold that the Old Testament also contains the idea. In Schreiner's case, his assumption that a primarily corporate election is logically impossible implicitly demands that the Old Testament contains a full-blown concept of individualistic election, taking election to refer to each member of the covenant having been chosen individually and separately to belong to God and enter into the covenant as his covenant partner, and taking corporate election to refer to each member of the covenant being chosen individually and separately to become part of the covenant people. But such a view is contrary to scholarly consensus, even among Calvinists.[65] Indeed,

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[65] It is probably fair to say that G. Quell's comments are representative of the scholarly consensus: "It is thus fairly evident that the spiritual context which has fashioned these occasional turns of phrase [i.e., references to individual election in the OT] is to be found in the belief in the election of the community of Yahweh . . . under the title of elect we find both the nameless righteous and the holders of great names. All are personal symbols of the people which has experienced election, and all the statements about individuals exemplify the one concept which derives from the community's heritage of faith" (G. Quell and G. Schrenk, "ἐκλέγομαι," *TDNT*, 4.144-76 [155]). It should be added that this quotation does not explicitly differentiate between election to service and election unto

> The corporate nature of the election of God's people in the Old Testament is so well recognized that Moo, an advocate of individual election in Paul's thought and Romans 9, concedes that Paul would have found only corporate election in the Scriptures and his Jewish tradition. And John Piper, one of the most forceful and outspoken modern advocates of individual election, is forced to acknowledge that "the eternal salvation of the individual as Paul teaches it is almost never the subject of discussion in the OT." [66]

Yet Schreiner does attempt to justify his stance with more than an untenable claim about logic; he offers biblical data in support of the thesis that election in the Old Testament was primarily individual.[67] He points to the individual election of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But ironically, these very examples are corporate in nature and support the concept

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salvation. Apart from the patriarchs (and possibly Moses), whose election is unique due to its corporate significance, there is no reference to the election of a specific individual unto spiritual salvation in the OT. The vast majority of the few references there are to individual election is of election to service within the elect people, such as kings and leaders.

[66] Abasciano, "Election," 353-54; see Moo, "Romans 9-11," 254-58 (cf. Moo, *Romans*, 586, esp. n. 73); Piper, *Justification of God*, 64.

[67] See Schreiner, "Response," 381-82. Schreiner admits "that the emphasis in the OT is on corporate election" (381), but it must be remembered that he considers it logically impossible that this could mean a group being chosen with the election of individuals consequent on membership in the group. For him, corporate election simply means the election of a group as the consequence of the separate individual election of a number of individuals who are then gathered together into a group.

of a primarily corporate election vis-à-vis the covenant people of God. Each of these individuals was chosen as the corporate head and representative of the covenant and his covenant descendants. The significance of this individual election for the covenant people was not that each of them would be chosen individually in the same way as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, but that they would be chosen as a consequence of their identification with Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob (see sections I, II, and III.2-3 above).[68]

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[68] It is also worth mentioning that the texts Schreiner cites of Abraham's election (Neh. 9:7; Josh. 24:3; Gen. 24:7) would not lend support to a Calvinistic concept of election anyway because they do not involve election *directly* unto salvation and they do not bespeak unconditionality. Neh. 9:7 appears to speak of God's choice of Abram for speaking to him and to bring him out of Ur, followed in 9:8 by reference to a later covenantal election of Abraham based on faith. Gen. 24:7 and Josh. 24:3 imply God's choice in his *taking* Abraham from his homeland, the same sort of election found in Neh. 9:7. But the text says nothing of God's choice being unconditional. It would beg the question to argue or assume that Abraham trusted God and followed his call because he was elected to do so irresistibly. That would be to read Calvinistic theology into the text. It certainly cannot be drawn from it. If anything, it would be more natural to see this election as conditional. God chose Abram to address, and so called him to follow him. Abraham then had a choice. If he had rejected God's call, then he would not have obtained salvation. Interestingly, the Hebrew word Schreiner seizes upon for indicating election in Gen. 24:7 and Josh. 24:3—לקח ("to take")—can be used with respect to conditional election, and is clearly so used in one of the very contexts Schreiner cites,

All agree that the Old Testament contains instances of individual divine election unto service. But the question we are dealing with is election unto salvation, the election of the covenant people of God, which establishes people as belonging to God and, at least ideally, as beneficiaries of his salvation.[69] Yet most advocates of individualistic election would agree that the Old Testament concept is not individualistic and that its corporate concept is not merely the election of individuals on their own who are then gathered into a group. They typically take a more moderate approach to try and establish individualistic election.

Some maintain that while the election of God's people is only corporate in the Old Testament, it becomes individualized in the New.[70] Others attempt to preserve some sort of individualistic election unto salvation in the Old Testament by asserting that there is a movement toward individual election in the Old Testament itself, even if it never reaches a fully individualistic level.[71] This latter, progressive view, points to the Old

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Gen. 24:4, where לקח involves the idea of choosing a wife and bringing her to her future husband. But the chosen woman must be willing to go for the choice to be fully made; the completion of the choice is conditional on her consent (24:5-8). So it is with the texts Schreiner cites concerning God "taking" Abraham, which look back on the completion of God's choice in actually leading Abraham out of the house and land of idolatry.

[69] On the ideal possession of the promises in the Old Covenant, see note 17 above.

[70] See again Moo, "Romans 9-11," 254-58; cf. Moo, *Romans*, 586, esp. n. 73.

[71] See e.g., Gary S. Shogren, "Election in the New Testament," *ABD*, 2.441–44; J.I. Packer, "Election," *NBD*^{2}, 314-17.

Testament concept of the remnant and prophetic announcements of God's acceptance of the faithful and rejection of the faithless within Israel as individualizing the concept of election. But both of these approaches run aground on a fact that we have already observed, that the Old Testament concept of corporate election always encompassed the inclusion and exclusion of individuals into/from the elect people without extending the concept of election itself to exit from or entrance into the corporate body and without shifting the locus of election to the individual (see sections II and III.1 above). From the beginning of the covenant, faithful members of the community were to enjoy the full blessings it promised and the unfaithful were to be cut off from it and its promises (e.g., Exod. 20:5-6; 32:31-35; Deut. 27–30). As Gary Burnett has observed of the Old Testament and Jewish perspective,

> [S]alvation was both a matter for the individual and the community of the people of God. One would participate in the salvation which God had prepared for his people by living as part of the covenant people . . . Only by deliberately sinning and refusing to repent could one become apostate and put oneself outside the covenant and therefore outside of salvation. The personal piety, we have noted, then, must be seen in the context of individuals seeking to live within the covenant, and in such a context, salvation was typically seen as concerning the nation (or the sectarian group within the nation),

> something in which an individual would participate, assuming he kept within covenantal boundaries.[72]

With this in mind as well as (a) Jesus' identity as the ultimate seed of Abraham and the head of the New Covenant, and (b) the fact that originally non-elect individuals could join the chosen people, J.I. Packer's (a Calvinist and advocate of individualistic election) own description of the development in the doctrine of election from the Old Testament to the New is telling:

> The NT announces the extension of God's covenant-promises to the Gentile world and the transference of covenant privileges from the lineal seed of Abraham to a predominantly Gentile body (cf. Mt. 21:43) consisting of all who had become Abraham's true seed and God's true Israel through faith in Christ (Rom. 4:4-9; 6:6f.; Gal. 3:14ff., 29; 6:16; Eph 2:11ff.; 3:6-8). The unbelieving natural branches were broken off from God's olive-tree (the elect community, sprung from the patriarchs), and wild olive branches (believing Gentiles) were ingrafted in their place (Rom. 11:16-24). Faithless Israel was rejected and judged, and the international Christian church took Israel's place as God's chosen nation, living in the world as his people and worshipping and proclaiming him as their God.[73]

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[72] Gary W. Burnett, *Paul and the Salvation of the Individual* (Biblical Interpretation Series 57; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2001), 80. Bewilderingly, Schreiner charges that the theological concept of the remnant undercuts a corporate view of election by unnecessarily making for two groups in which election is validated by faith—Israel and the remnant ("Response," 381). But even if his own questionable definition of the remnant is granted for the sake of argument, his point lacks cogency, for the remnant would simply be those who truly share in Israel's corporate election by faith, leaving only one group in which corporate election is validated by faith—the remnant.

[73] Packer, "Election," 316.

There may be some problems in this description, but its picture of election is largely on target and, perhaps unwittingly, quite in line with the Old Testament corporate view in its wording. The community is elect, rooted in the election of the patriarchs (the covenant heads). With the advent of Christ and the New Covenant of which he is the head as the seed of Abraham, Jews who embraced Jesus remain part of God's chosen people, Jews who refused to believe in Christ were cut off from the elect people, and Gentiles who believe get grafted into God's chosen people as would any formerly unbelieving Jews who come to faith. On both the individual and corporate level, election is contingent on faith in Christ, who is the difference between the Old and New Covenants in terms of election. With respect to the corporate vs. individual orientation of election, there is nothing that would suggest a change from the former to the latter. Indeed, there is every indication that election remains corporate since Christ takes the patriarchs' place as the head of the covenant and the corporate representative of God's people, and people become part of God's people by covenantal union with Christ.

IV. *CONCLUSION*

A proper conception of corporate election unto salvation withstands the criticisms that have been leveled against it. Most of these arise from misunderstanding of the concept. The core of such criticism is the mistaken notion that corporate election does not involve the election of individuals, a notion that tends to be fed by individualistic

presuppositions.[74] These presuppositions can be so deeply ingrained that some advocates of individualistic election believe that the very concept of a primarily corporate election is logically impossible. But we have seen that such a position is untenable, doing more to betray the unquestioned presuppositions of certain scholars that prevent them from understanding corporate election than to impugn the concept itself. It is not that either the corporate or individualistic view is logically impossible, but a question of which kind of election is in view when the Bible speaks of the election of God's people unto salvation. We have concluded that it is corporate election that is the biblical view.

Corporate election does involve the election of individuals. But it recognizes that one individual is first chosen uniquely as the foundation of the people of God, serving as their corporate head and representative. They are thus chosen in him, which is to say, by virtue of their identification with him. Individuals are elect secondarily, viz. as a consequence of identification with the corporate head and membership in his people. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the corporate head and representative of the Church, the eschatological people of God. Individuals become united to Christ by faith, making election unto salvation ultimately conditional on faith in Christ.

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[74] There are two related presuppositions at work: (1) that the individual is primary and the group secondary in the sense that the identity and benefits of the group derive from the discrete identity and status of the individuals gathered together as a group, yielding (2) that there is a one-to-one correlation between the group and the individual so that what is true of the group is true of the individual in the exact same way.