

“Pre-Christmas Selection”

One of our most popular traditions is the exchange of gifts at the time we celebrate the birth of Jesus. As a result, there are many pre-Christmas choices to make: What will we give to each person? Which specific kind or brand will we select?

In the same way, God the Father made pre-nativity choices. In no way, then, was the birth of Jesus the beginning of God’s work.

In Ephesians 1:3 Paul praises God because He bestowed every needed salvation gift upon Christians. Throughout the first three chapters of this letter Paul lists these benefits, starting with 1:4: “just as He chose us in Him [i.e. in Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless in His eyes” (my own translation). What this means is that in eternity past God selected people from out of the total of sinful humanity that He would work in them to be set apart, morally transformed, and viewed by Him as if they had never sinned. This selection was made by the Father in view of the fact that these chosen ones would be united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:1-11).

What Paul is speaking of here is election, that is, God’s choice of whom He would redeem before man was created and sinned. Recently, I have been asked about this biblical teaching. Here are some basics.

The Bible Teaches It

There is no way we should ignore the subject since the Bible often speaks of it (e.g. Dt. 7:6; Amos 3:2; Romans 8:29-30, 33; 11:7; 2 Thes. 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10). The doctrine of election was not invented by theologians in a smoke-filled backroom!

Election Is Unconditional

Historically, thoughtful Christians have not denied this teaching, but have wrestled with whether God’s selection of the chosen is made conditioned upon His looking at their future faith or if it is made unconditionally. What is at stake is what is determinative in salvation: our choice or God’s grace? The Bible is clear it is the latter (Dt. 7:6-8; Mt. 11:25-26; Rom. 9:11-13; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Election Has Powerful Application

1. It brings great security. Is. 41:8-11; 43:1
2. It brings humility and motivates toward obedience. Dt. 7:6-9; Amos 3:1-2f.; Eph. 2:8-10
3. It highlights God’s grace and that salvation is of Him, rather than giving the credit ultimately to our choice or ability. Rom. 9:11-16 (Romans 10 shows election does not nullify human responsibility)
4. It convinces us God truly is orchestrating all things together for the good of His people. Rom. 8:28-30
5. It encourages evangelism since we know some will respond. Acts 18:10
6. It leads to praise of God, a note we should strike at Christmas! Romans 9:6-29; 11:33-36

Election Should Be Taught

Since all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), election should be taught. I praise God He gave me the gift of a congregation which desires the whole counsel of God to be taught, even the hard doctrines!