

You Heard—You Believed—You Were Marked

Scripture: In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we (Jews), who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-14

A few examples that show God chooses: (*See also Acts 13:48 and 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5*)

- For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Deuteronomy 7:6
- Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Romans 8:29-30
- “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up . . .” John 6:44

A few examples that show we choose: (*See also John 1:12; Rev. 3:20; Rom. 10:9; I Tim. 2:3-4; and Rom. 3:24*)

- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16
- The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. John 3:35-36
- For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. Titus 2:11-12

Discussion Questions

1. In Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul praises God for choosing us in Christ and predestining us to sonship in His kingdom. But what does that mean? It's called the doctrine of election and it has been debated for centuries by Biblical scholars who truly want to interpret it correctly. Some say it means that God elects certain individuals for salvation and only those He chooses can be saved. Others say it means that He has elected the church to be His people, much as He chose the Jews, and that all individuals can come to Christ by faith. And there are scriptures that support each position. Despite the obvious tension between the two, the Bible teaches both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Why wouldn't God make it clear and remove all doubt? Does it matter if we agree? Why or why not?
2. With all that in mind, what does it mean to you to be “chosen” by God? What does Paul mean when he says we are “predestined”? When and why did God predestine us to what? Does any of this really matter, or is it just a big theological debate without practical application to our lives? Why or why not?
3. Three questions often arise when discussing election: (i) Is God fair? (ii) If God chooses and we don't, does this make us robots? (iii) If no one has a choice, why should I evangelize? How would you answer them?
4. In vs. 12, Paul specifically refers to the Jews, God's chosen people who “hoped in Christ” (or looked forward to the promised Messiah). How does what he says about them also apply to Gentile believers?
5. God's plan is to establish a kingdom based on holiness and love with those He redeems and matures. He executes it while looking for faith and faithfulness, which show up as we exercise free will and self-control. How does having the Holy Spirit as a seal combine with faithfulness to make His plan a reality?
6. Vs. 14 says that we are to bring Him praise. If we see this as our purpose in life, how will it change the way we live? How can our church bring praise to God?

Wrap Up: God chooses and we choose. The Bible doesn't put human will at odds with divine sovereignty, as if only one could be real. It simply (if mysteriously) upholds both concepts as valid. Man has a genuine will and is responsible—and God is sovereign over all things. As Charles Spurgeon said, “I never have to reconcile friends. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility have never had a falling out with each other. I do not need to reconcile what God has joined together.”