

The Trinity and the Doctrine of Election (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Summary: Theologians distinguish between whom God is as Trinity (essentially, ontologically) and how the same Trinity operates in history (missional/operational/appropriation).

Appropriation means “to draw to the proper” and describes how each person of the Trinity acts in history. Every act excludes no other person, for God is one. There is a concurrence of each person in every act. At the same time, each person of the Trinity possesses a distinct mode of action in time and space that is consistent with their eternal relations: Father (unbegotten paternity), Son (begotten, filiation), and Spirit (spiration). No person of the Trinity can ever act apart from the other, for God is one, yet each has distinct inseparable actions. The role of each person of the Trinity is not interchangeable, but neither are they independent, for God is one.

1. The Trinitarian Plan of Election (v.3-4)

- Ephesians 1:3-14 is one continual, uninterrupted, single sentence in Greek. It is called a “doxology.”
- A doxology means “speaking glory.” Paul is speaking (writing) glory to all persons of the Trinity for Their one act of “spiritual blessings.”
- The Father and the Son are expressly mentioned (v.3), while the Holy Spirit is alluded to. He is mentioned as a person (v. 13-14). In every operation (in history), the Spirit is closely conjoined with and inseparable from the Father and the Son. There is a concurrence of each person in every act.
- The “He” who chose “us” is the Father, and the “in Him” in whom the “us” is chosen to be is in Christ.
- The Father is the architect, the planner, and the communicator (missionally) to the Son and the Spirit. While God is one, each person (missionally) behaves consistently with Their eternal relations. The Father chose a people He gave to His Son (John 17:6-7, 10, 12, 13).
- The doctrine of election: Before creation, based on His good pleasure alone, God chose for Himself a people to be the recipients of His divine salvific favor.
- The Father chose “us” (the elect) before the foundations of the world.
- The Greek word for “chose” is a compound of two words: “ek” (from/out of) and “lego” (select of choose). It refers to taking or selecting something smaller out of a whole.

2. The Trinitarian Motive for Election (v.4-5)

- Love: The Father’s love for the Son (Matt.3:17), Son’s love for the Father (John 14:31), and the Spirit’s love for both the Father and the Son (Rom. 5:1-5) is the motivating driving factor for election.
- Love permeates the doctrine of election, for God essentially is love. Love, essentially, gives itself willingly and uncoerced.
- While the Son was sent by the Father (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14), the Son went willingly (John 10:18). They are so intrinsically bound, as one, that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (John 14:10-11).

- The Father’s sending His Son, Son’s willingness to become incarnate, and Spirit’s subsequent sending are done out of Trinitarian love amongst each person.
- This is from the goodwill/good pleasure (purpose) of God. God is pleased with the doctrine of election.

Man, naturally:

- Is spiritually dead (Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1)
- follows the fallen human system of the world willingly (Eph. 2:2)
- Rejects God and is the recipient of His wrath (Eph. 2:3)
- Has no innate desire to follow God (Rom. 3:11)

Every man and woman born is spiritually dead, unable, and unwilling to come to God on their own. Man must be sovereignly and supernaturally changed from the inside out to love God. That is appropriated to the Spirit (John 3:6-8), Who regenerates.

3. The Trinitarian Result of Election (v.4-6)

- God elects for Himself a people. God predestines those people.
- Predestination means “before the horizon,” which refers to boundaries. Predestination sets boundaries and limits beforehand. The aorist tense in Greek demonstrates that it is an actual event in the past that has an abiding reality.
- In love, God has predestined (set limits and boundaries) for “us.” (v.5). This predestination marks the boundaries of everyone who will become the “us.” Predestination in Scripture entails people, boundaries, and decrees (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11).
- The result:
 - A. Positional and practical holiness and blamelessness (v.4): in faith, positionally, because of Christ’s active (credit of His perfection and righteousness to our account) and passive obedience (assuming on Himself our sin) and practically (as the Spirit of God sanctifies us).
 - B. Adoption into God’s family through Christ (v.5): adoption brought a complete break from the old family and created a new family relationship with all the privileges and responsibilities of that new family. The adopted son became an heir to the father’s estate. The old life of the adopted son was utterly erased. Man is not born into God’s family. He must be adopted in Christ (v.5).
 - C. Praise to God for His glorious grace (v.5): the natural outworking of the adopted child is thanksgiving and adoration for God’s unmerited favor.
 - D. Blessings in the Beloved (v.6): the benefits of union with Christ, now being loved with the same love that the Father has toward the Son by calling God your “Father.” The Father’s love for you has not supplanted His love for His Son. The Father’s love for the Son is primary, for the Father and the Son have essentially loved one another. We are loved with this same love because we are in Christ (v.3).

Election, predestination, salvation, regeneration, sanctification, justification, glorification, and the atonement are grounded, ordered, planned, accomplished, and executed by the Trinity and bound intrinsically together.