TMSJ 11/1 (Spring 2000) 75-91

EPHESIANS 1:3-4 AND THE NATURE OF ELECTION

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Ephesians 1:3-4 highlights the very important doctrine of election, but the passage is not without interpretive challenges that relate to that doctrine. An examination of individual words and phrases within the section reflects whether it supports the teaching of corporate or individual election. The two verses are part of a doxology that occupies 1:3-14 and emphasizes God's activity in benefiting His people. Various words and phrases within the doxology that contribute toward a correct understanding of election are "He chose," "He predestined," "us," "in Christ," "holy," "blameless," "with every spiritual blessing," and "in the heavenly places.*" An examination of those leads to the conclusion that God in eternity past selected certain individuals to receive a comprehensive spiritual package that includes justification and adoption. The two verses rule out the position of corporate election and support an individual, unconditional view of election.*

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The subject of election has been a controversial one in the history of the church.[1] Two opposing viewpoints have traditionally dominated the debate: unconditional, individual election (normally associated with a Calvinistic theology) and conditional individual election (normally associated with an Arminian theology). This scenario is changing and a third view is becoming increasingly popular.

The last four decades have brought an increasing number of books that advocate a corporate view on the subject of election.[2] The view first denies

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[1]For good summaries of the controversy's history see *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) by A. C. Custance (3-77) and *Predestination, Grace and Free Will* (Westminster: Newman, 1964) by Dom M. John Farrelly (71-138).

[2]J. A. T. Robinson's book, *The Body* (London: SCM, 1952), led the way, followed by E. Best's *One Body in Christ* (London: SPCK, 1955). Robert Shank popularized this emphasis in *Elect in the Son: A Study in the Doctrine of Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), originally released in 1970, followed by *God's Strategy in Human History* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984) by R. Forster and V. Paul Marston, and more recently William W. Klein's *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

individual election to salvation and then teaches that all instances where individuals are chosen in Scripture are appointments to service. A Christian is only elect by virtue of Christ's election, not on account of a pretemporal choice by God out of the mass of fallen humanity. It is at the point of conversion, i.e., a believer's incorporation into the church, that election could be said to apply to any individual.

Though the topic of election is controversial in theological debate, it is crucial to a theological understanding of salvation. One cannot divorce an understanding of election from a correct view of God since God is the agent who does the choosing. Likewise, it is impossible to separate an understanding of election from one's view of man since he is the object being chosen. God and man are defined in part by the definition given to election, which makes this subject of prime importance.

A proper comprehension of election is also critical to evangelism,[3] which is a primary task of the church. One's view of election defines the natures of preaching and conversion, and so again the importance of a correct understanding cannot be overstated. In addition, the issue of eternal security has its roots in the ground of election and the relative parts played by God and man in it. All of these combined demand a true biblical comprehension of the elements of election.

Proponents of the corporate understanding of election use Eph 1:3-4 to support their position. The following discussion explores the nature of election in Eph 1:3-4 by analyzing the exegetical data of the passage in its context and paying special attention to key terms related to election, so that a clear picture of Paul's understanding of election may result. A determination of whether either the corporate or the individual position can be sustained biblically will then be possible.

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF EPHESIANS 1:3-4

Context of the Passage

Ephesians gives no clear indication of any special circumstances that prompted Paul to write the epistle. This is unlike its companion epistle Colossians. Therefore the subject matter in Ephesians incorporates a bigger picture than one local church's needs.[4] The central theme of the epistle is "God's overall design for his Church and for his world,"[5] a theme that Paul powerfully introduces in the opening doxology within which these verses occur.

The immediate context of the passage is a unified sequence of thought

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[3]For a discussion of the relationship of evangelism to election, see J. I. Packer's fourth chapter entitled, "Divine Sovereignty and Evangelism," in *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966).

[4]Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, revised by Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 19.

[5]A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in Vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (vol. 11; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 17.

expressed in one sentence spanning verses three through fourteen of chapter one.[6] The opening word, "Blessed" (Εὐλογητός, *Eulogētos*), declares the focus of this section. Paul affirms that God is blessed, an identification of God's intrinsic character,[7] and then he elaborates on how God expressed this blessedness toward humanity in salvation.[8] God is the active agent throughout the doxology and the benefactors of His activity are people.

It is God "who has blessed" (verse 3), chosen (verse 4), "predestined," "freely bestowed" (verse 5), lavished redemption and forgiveness (verses 7-8), "made known" and "purposed" (verse 9), given an inheritance, working everything according to His will (verse 11), sealed (verse 13), and given the Holy Spirit (verse 14).[9] Therefore, it will be His glory that is praised (vv. 6, 12 and 14).

Only two times in the entire doxology does Paul clearly refer to a necessary human activity.[10] In verse thirteen, he declares the two pre-conditions of the Holy Spirit's sealing: hearing and believing, both of which are also dependent on divine activity.[11] God must send the preacher (Rom 10:15), and supply the spiritual power for the message to accomplish its task (1 Cor 2:1-5; Eph 2:8). Therefore, even when the sinner is active, so must God be also. Thus the entire context emphasizes strongly the primacy of God's role in salvation.

The repeated emphasis on the controlling factor of God's actions, His purposeful will (1:5, 9, 11), reinforces that primacy. Paul emphasizes the freedom of God to act solely according to His volition, independent of all external factors.[12] God's will has purpose, but that purpose is not to be found outside Himself. He is sovereignly independent in all His actions.[13] The passage has a corresponding

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[6]A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 432-33.

[7]T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) 3.

[8]Considerable debate exists as to what, if any, verb should be supplied with Εὐλογητός here. Four possibilities are: supply ἐστί, "is," which makes the statement an affirmation; or, ἔστω, "be," which makes it an exhortation; or, εἴη, "may . . . be," which expresses a desire, wish; or, no verb, which then makes it an exclamation. The analogy of these verbals and the consistent use of the indicative mood suggests the first option is best.

[9]Steve Delamarter, "Biblical Studies on the Doctrine of Election" (Research Paper, Western Evangelical Seminary, 1978) 9.

[10]Possibly "holy and blameless" in verse four has reference to human activity, but it is preferable to view these terms as a description of the believer's position, not practice. See the discussion later in this article on pp. 86-88.

[11]To realize that this human activity is that of unsaved sinners, not already saved saints, is important. God's salvific activity is directed to unbelievers who will become believers, but are not yet so.

[12]Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Winona Lake, Ind.: Alpha Publications, 1979) 316.

[13]John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 34-35.

emphasis on grace in the first expression of God's ultimate purpose, "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6) and in the description of His riches which have been lavished on believers (1:7). Grace, by definition, points to the unworthiness of the recipient and the generosity of the giver,[14] which elevates the actions of the one dispensing it.

Paul could not have more powerfully highlighted the supreme position of God in salvation, than in 1:3-4 which introduces this emphasis.

Key Expressions in the Context

Having an accurate understanding of the meaning of "He chose" (ἐξελέξατο, *exelexato*), the subsequent parallel concept, "predestined" (προορίσας, *proorisas*), the referent, "us" (ἡμᾶς, *hēmas*), and the oft repeated "in Christ" formula is critical. Added to these is the correct understanding of the concepts of holiness and blamelessness that Paul refers to here.

The Meaning of "He chose" (ἐξελέξατο, exelexato)

Exelexato is part of the word group, which has the basic sense of "to gather" and by extension "to say, speak."[15] The common Greek sense of ἐκλέγομαι (middle voice, *eklegomai*) is "to choose, to pick out,"[16] and it may refer to a thing (Luke 10:42; 14:7), but primarily alludes to people in the NT, as it does here.[17] It often designates an appointment to a position of service, such as the twelve disciples (Luke 6:13; cf. Mark 3:13-14). Jesus Christ is designated the Elect One (Luke 9:35), and the church as His chosen people (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9).

The middle voice suggests the action of the verb bears some additional relationship to the subject rendering it.[18] Westcott states that whenever *eklegomai* is used in the NT, the middle voice emphasizes "the relation of the person chosen to the special purpose of him who chooses."[19] The emphasis is on the subject, His activity and aim. God has made a specific choice, which is directed by His own

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[14]R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 181-84.

[15]A. Debrunner, "λέγω κ. τ. λ.," *TDNT*, 4:71-73.

[16]Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 196.

[17]BAGD, 242.

[18]H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1957) 156-58

[19]Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 8. See also John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 11.

purpose.[20]

The point of difficulty is the nature of God's choice. Does it include the sense of choosing out of a group, thus excluding a portion of them, or not? Are the objects of His choice individuals, groups, or solely Christ? Meyer categorically states,

> Entirely without reason Hoffmann, *Schriftbeweis*, I. p. 223, denies that ἐκλέγεσθαι here has reference to *others not chosen*, and asserts that it applies *only* to that which we, in the absence of election should not have become. This is according to the very *notion* of the word quite impossible. Ἐκλέγεσθαι *always* has, and must *of logical necessity* have, a reference to *others*, to whom the chosen would, without the ἐκλογή, still belong.[21]

Logic must have the support of exegesis, and the biblical usage certainly supports Meyer's logic.

The Hebrew equivalent is בָּחַר (*bāhar*, "he chooses"),[22] and its OT usage supports the idea of a choice out of many.[23] The choice of Israel involved the by-passing of other nations (Deut. 7:6; 14:2) and even within the nation, the tribe of Judah was chosen and Ephraim rejected (Ps 78:67-68).[24] Such was also true of individuals, such as David who was chosen from among his brothers (1 Samuel 16; cf. Ps 78:70).

The NT usage continues this sense (Luke 6:13; John 15:19; Acts 1:24; 15:7), where some were chosen and others were not.[25] Abbott objects that instances occur where the idea of choice from among others is missing, but he can only cite the example of Christ.[26] It would be unwise to use the election of Christ as a standard in defining the meaning of the word, since He is unique in every respect and certainly to be distinguished from fallen humanity in the matter of election.

Lenski suggests that the compound form itself through the prefix ἐκ (*ek*)

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[20]The aorist tense developed a large variety of uses, but its original use was to express punctiliar action. It came to be applied to durative actions and so became the common method of expressing indefinite action, allowing the context to define it more exactly (Robertson, *Grammar* 830-31). It commonly expresses the fact of an action without regard to its duration or temporal significance (Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 193-95). The reference to "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3) in the context here demands a single act of election in eternity past.

[21]Meyer, *Ephesians* 313.

[22]For extensive treatment of the Hebrew term בָּחַר, see Horst Seebass, "בָּחַר," *TDOT,2:*73-87; John N. Oswalt, "בָּחַר," *TWOT*, 1:100-101; G. Quell, "ἐλέγομαι, Election in the Old Testament," *TDNT*, 4:145-71.

[23]Eadie, *Ephesians* 18.

[24]Although not stated directly, this implies the rejection of the other tribes also.

[25]S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 3:248.

[26]Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

implies a choice *out of* a group.[27] But others look to the aorist tense used here, as an indication of immediate election at the point of calling,[28] or the immediately following phrase, "in Him," as a qualification leading to a corporate understanding.[29] The aorist tense, however, is qualified by the subsequent temporal statement which fixes the activity of election in eternity past, before the creation of the material universe.[30] The "in Christ" formula will be examined later,[31] but it does not demand a corporate meaning to the exclusion of an individual one, thereby denying the excluding of some in election.

The accumulation of evidence is strong: (1) the literal meaning of the term; (2) the logical inference from the term; (3) the OT usage of the Hebrew equivalent, *bāhar*; (4) the NT usage of the term; and (5) even the prefix *ek* contained in the term. All these support the concept of choice out of a group to the exclusion of the remaining members of the group. Therefore, Paul, writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, chooses to describe as the first expression of God's manifold blessings, His selection of certain people, to the exclusion of certain others. It remains to be shown whether the objects of this particular activity are unbelievers or believers.[32]

*The Meaning of "He predestined" (*προορίσας **[proorisas]***)*

This verb *proorisas* is a "late and rare compound" that means "to define or decide beforehand,"[33] and the NT uses it of God's eternal decrees.[34] The prefix πρό (*pro*) "expresses the fact that the decree is prior to the realization of its object."[35] It does not mean before others, but before fulfillment, which is not strictly a time referent, but it is clear from the immediate context that this divine activity is before creation also.[36]

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[27]R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961) 354.

[28]Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

[29]Shank, *Elect in the Son* 45-46.

[30]O. Hofius, "καταβάλλω," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 255-56.

[31]See pages 83-86 of this article.

[32]See pages 82-83 of this article.

[33]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931) 4:517. For examples of the use of ὁρίζω in late, secular Greek, see James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 457.

[34]Leslie C. Allen examines the OT background of προορίζω and suggests an association with God's eternal decrees. He concludes that the decrees are indeed ancient, being before time itself ("The Old Testament Background of [πρό] ὁρίζειν in the New Testament," *NTS* 17 [October 1970]:104-8).

[35]Salmond, "Ephesians" 251.

[36]Meyer, *Ephesians* 315.

Here *proorisas* occurs as a participle qualifying the main verb,[37] *exelexato*, previously stated in verse four, and specifies the action of God in eternity whereby He has fixed in advance the destiny of certain people.[38] The Greek term υἱοθεσίαν (*huiothesian*),[39] translated "adoption as sons," describes that destiny as God's taking the elect into His family.[40] By this act, the elect receive the family name and inheritance, as if they were natural sons.[41]

In this context, considerable disagreement exists over the nature of the participle. Is it causal, giving the reason for election,[42] or temporal, indicating predestination is prior to election,[43] or modal, expressing the form which election took?[44] Although the participle may carry a causal sense,[45] there is no real distinction between *exelexato* and *proorisas* beyond that indicated by the prefixes *ek* and *pro*. The first emphasizes the nature of the selection and the second the certainty of it.[46]

Elsewhere predestination is never distinguished from election with regard to chronology[47] or logical priority. God's foreknowledge is the only concept given any sequential priority (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2),[48] and despite the fact that the most common use of the aorist participle is temporal sequence, indicating a prior action,

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[37]The participle also occurs in verse eleven in relationship to another main verb ἐκληρώθημεν, but there it explains the basis of ἐκληρώθημεν. The believer's relationship to God is not accidental or incidental, but "founded on and resulting from the eternal foreordaining purpose of God Himself" (Salmond, "Ephesians" 264).

[38]Lenski, *Ephesians* 360-61.

[39]This term also appears in Rom 8:13, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5. Paul develops the concept of filial relationship more fully in Gal 4:1-6, drawing on the Roman custom of adoption whereby it was possible to adopt a child who was not one's own son, often as a remedy for childlessness. This was a legal process, requiring witnesses, which gave the adopted child the full rights of a natural son. It is never used of Christ, for He alone is God's Son by nature, and it emphasizes that a believer's sonship is conferred by divine act (Eduard Schweizer, "υἱοθεσία," *TDNT* 8:399).

[40]Robertson, *Word Pictures* 301-2.

[41]Salmond, "Ephesians" 251-52.

[42]Abbott, *Ephesians* 8.

[43]Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, with a Revised Translation* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859) 7-8.

[44]Meyer, *Ephesians* 315.

[45]Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 227.

[46]Eadie, *Ephesians* 31.

[47]Ellicott, in his commentary on Ephesians (*Ephesians* 8), argues that Rom 8:29-30 provides a sequence of divine salvific activities which places predestination prior to election, but this can only be sustained if ἐκάλεσεν is another term for election, which it clearly is not. It refers to the historical moment of the effectual call of the elect sinner to salvation (K. L. Schmidt, "καλέω κ. τ. λ.," *TDNT* 3:487-536).

[48]Meyer, *Ephesians* 315. See Alfred Junior Martin's article for a discussion of foreknowledge, "The Sovereignty of Grace as Seen in Romans 8:28-30," *BSac* 99 (October-December 1942):453-68.

the evidence is against it here. A non-sequential understanding is not unusual since aorist participles commonly express simultaneous action.[49]

The primary emphasis is contained in the main verb *exelexato*, and the participle provides a further aspect of its meaning. If a causal or temporal sense is adopted,[50] the emphasis reverses and predestination becomes the primary thought. It is better to view God's act of election as being expressed in the predestination of the elect, so that the primacy of election remains without diminishing the importance of predestination. Therefore the participle is modal and the two concepts are simultaneous acts of God, without temporal sequence.

The Meaning of "us" (*ἡμᾶς [hēmas]*)

The simple pronoun *hēmas*, easily translated "us," expresses the object of the divine activity in this context, but the exact meaning is harder to define. Most commentators agree that it refers to Christians in general in the early verses of this section.[51] It is less clear whether God viewed the objects of His election in their saved or unsaved condition. Determining this is crucial for an understanding of the nature of election.

The context contains no indication of any preconditions related to election or predestination. The sealing of believers by the Holy Spirit has two prerequisites: hearing and believing, but since these are activities in human history, occurring at the point of conversion, they are not to be transferred into eternity past as conditions of election.[52] The purpose of election is expressed by εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ (*einai hēmas hagious kai amōmous katenōpion autou*), "that we should be holy and blameless before him,"[53] which cannot be both the goal and the ground of election. Only unbelievers need to be brought to this state.[54]

It is therefore apparent that God is dealing with humanity in its fallen condition, which means the objects of election are unbelievers, who will become

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[49]Robertson, *Grammar* 860-61.

[50]The one so acting is God and in light of His attribute of omniscience, knowing all things, at all times, all at the same time, it is contradictory to have sequence of time in His thought processes. See Norman Geisler's comments in his chapter, "God Knows All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, David and Randall Basinger, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986) 67.

[51]Some of these are Henry Alford (9), Heinrich Meyer (311), John Eadie (12), Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 6, and Charles Ellicott (4) in their respective commentaries on Ephesians. See also Donald Jayne's short comments, "'We' and 'You' in Ephesians," *ExpTim* 85/5 (February 1974):151-52.

[52]Paul K. Jewett, *Election & Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 73.

[53]See pages 86-88 for a discussion of these terms. It will be argued that they signify full justification and thus indicate election is purposed to save the elect.

[54]C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: An Introductory Guide to the Doctrine of Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 93-94.

believers on account of their election.[55] Paul is referring to them as those in time, who have already benefited from their election, but God views them prior to all that His activity will produce.

The Meaning of the "in Christ" formula (*ἐν Χριστῷ, ἐν αὐτῷ, ἐν ᾧ [en Christō, en autō, en hō]*)

The "in Christ" formula is one of Paul's favorite phrases in this epistle, occurring at least thirty-four times.[56] There are ten references in this section alone (1:3-14) and two in this passage. The exact meaning is difficult to determine and there is much diversity of opinion, but an accurate understanding of election and predestination is impossible without it.[57]

The preposition can express locality or instrumentality,[58] and Allan suggests the latter sense is predominant in Paul's use of it in Ephesians in connection with Christ.[59] Robertson considers that *en*, when used with reference to people, expresses the concept of mystical union,[60] and certainly the elect must be in union with Him to obtain the spiritual benefits associated with election. Meyer interprets the preposition as having an inclusive sense, which narrows the source of all the divine blessings to Christ and no other.[61] In addition, Wedderburn, when discussing Paul's use of this phrase, includes a causative sense.[62] It is necessary to understand the connection of the formula in this context before reaching a definitive understanding of it.

Commentators do not agree upon the connection of this formula in verse 3. Does it refer to *hēmas*, and, if it does, in what sense?[63] Or does it refer only to the activity of election without reference to *hēmas*?[64] Or does it refer only to Christ and specify Him as The Elect One?[65] The latter two views have major objections to

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[55]The plural form is not a designation of corporeality, but an identification of the numerous individuals who are among the elect.

[56]John A. Allan, "The 'in Christ' Formula in Ephesians," *NTS* 5 (1958-1959):54.

[57]For a theological discussion of this formula that highlights the difficulties in expressing its meaning, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (one volume edition; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 948-54.

[58]G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 150-51; Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary* 209-10.

[59]Allan, "The 'in Christ' Formula" 59.

[60]Robertson, *Grammar* 587.

[61]Meyer, *Ephesians* 312.

[62]A. J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ,'" *JSNT* 25 (October 1985):84, 89.

[63]Ellicott, *Ephesians* 6.

[64]Lenski, *Ephesians* 354-56.

[65]Shank, *Elect in the Son* 45-46.

overcome, since the object of the verb *exelexato*, is certainly *hēmas*, not *autō*. It is impossible to dismiss *hēmas* as the focus of election, though admittedly the centrality of Christ is significant. Therefore, the formula is not connected directly to the verb, but qualifies *hēmas* in some way.

This phrase points out the position of those defined by *hēmas*, a position that has eternal and temporal aspects. Elsewhere Christ's relationship to His people is clearly that of federal redemptive representation (cf. Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22).[66] As fallen humanity is related to Adam, so the elect are related to Christ.[67] Hodge points out that the OT pattern of an Israelite's enjoyment of blessing on account of his relationship to Abraham and God's covenant with him supports a parallel understanding here.[68]

Salmond suggests this formula expresses that Christ is the *causa meritoria* of election.[69] Wong sees in this formula all redemptive activities and suggests it also includes their efficacy, which Christ's direct performance achieved.[70] These suggestions would harmonize with the causal and instrumental uses of the preposition *en*, but they are clearly seen only in other passages. In this context no such clear meaning appears, and in fact, when Paul expresses the instrumental aspect of Christ's relationship to the elect in vv. 5 and 7, he uses διά (*dia*), not *en*. One would expect some distinctive meaning for *en*. Therefore it would be incorrect to render it as *dia*, "through Christ," because Christ is more than the instrument,[71] and when Paul wants to use *dia* to express instrument, he does so.[72]

Another difficulty associated with these nuances is their adverbial character, which would lead one to connect the formula to *exelexato*, but which contradicts the previous argument for a connection with *hēmas*. It is probable that Paul has omitted an article between *hēmas* and *en autō* which would, if included, give a rendering, "He chose us (who are) in Christ." This would give further support

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[66]Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

[67]The scope of this article does not allow a discussion of the nature of humanity's relationship to Adam. The question of seminal unity cannot be answered here, but it is not critical to the analysis of Eph 1:3-4. The writer holds a federal only position. For further reading see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 2:192-214.

[68]C. H. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 31.

[69]Salmond, "Ephesians" 247.

[70]Simon Sek-Muk Wong, "A Semantic Analysis of Ephesians 1:3-14" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987) 86.

[71]Abbott, *Ephesians* 5-6.

[72]In v. 5 Paul uses διά with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, and also in verse seven with τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, and so a mere substitution would fail to account for the nuances contained in the words. Robertson suggests that Paul's use of διά with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ points to Christ as the representative of mankind (A. T. Robertson, *Grammar* 583).

for an adjectival sense, describing the position of those designated by *hēmas*.[73] Although the instrumental and causal senses are clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture and even in this section (1:5), it is better to assign the formula, as used here, the concept of mystical union.[74]

Previously it was determined that *hēmas* referred to people in their pre-conversion condition, i.e., while unbelievers, with reference to their election. It was also decided that Paul refers to them as those who have already benefitted from that election. The formula would therefore explain the condition of the elect when their election is realized. The historical realization of God's electing activity is the elects' mystical union with Christ.

The previous occurrence of *en Christō* with ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ (*en pasē eulogia*, "with every blessing") harmonizes with this sense, for it is in union with Him that these blessings are historically realized. Such an understanding fits well with the positional emphasis introduced in v. 3 by ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (*en tois epouraniois*, "in the heavenlies") and also parallels both the local and mystical ideas contained in this phrase.[75] This concept harmonizes with Robertson's suggestion for *en*, but does not exclude further aspects of the elects' relationship to Christ. The discussion of predestination (v. 5) and the agency of Christ's blood (v. 7) express these subsequently.[76]

Though it is true that Christ is God's Elect One (Isa 42:1, 6 f.; cf. Matt 12:18) and that apart from His election there could be no realization of the election of unbelievers, His election is of a different nature. Christ was elected to be the redeemer in contrast to sinners being elected for redemption. Thus Christ's election does not truly parallel that of Christians, and so theirs cannot be contained in His.

Therefore the "in Christ" formula used in Ephesians is best defined as describing the mystical union of the elect with Christ,[77] which is the historical

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[73]In Classical Greek a prepositional phrase may be employed as an attributive expression modifying a substantive. In such cases the article is added before the prepositional phrase for the sake of clarity. In the NT, however, there are a considerable number of instances where the article is omitted, and this is true in Paul, such as in Eph 2:11, τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί; Eph 4:1, ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ; Col. 1:2, τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς (Nigel Turner, "Syntax," *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, James Hope Moulton, ed., Vol. 3 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963] 221-22). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume the article has also been omitted in Eph 1:4.

[74]This is the conclusion of Richard Longenecker in his discussion of liberty in Christ. He considers the formula has a definite local nuance which is mystical in nature, but "not the pagan mysticism of absorption, for the 'I' and the 'Thou' of the relation retain their identities. But it is the 'I and Thou' communion at its highest" (Richard L. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976] 160-70).

[75]For further study of the local nuance of ἐν, see the appendix by Colin Brown, ed., *NIDNTT* 1190-93, and Nigel Turner, "Syntax" 262-64.

[76]Robertson suggests that Paul's use of διά with Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ in verse 5 has a representative meaning (*Grammar* 583).

[77]The limited scope of this work does not permit a detailed explanation of this concept, but its identification is sufficient in analyzing corporate and individual election.

realization of their eternal election and reception of all the accompanying spiritual blessings.[78]

***The Meaning of "holy" (*ἁγίους **[hagious]*) *and "blameless" (*ἀμώμους **[amōmous]*)**

The adjective/substantive *hagious*, primarily meant "dedicated to the gods," and by extension, "worthy of veneration."[79] The basic idea is one of separation and consecration, where what is set apart is to be removed from worldly defilement and joined to divine purity. This then gave the word a moral significance, which, when applied to God's people, denotes the obligations of a new position.[80]

The second term *amōmous* was used in the LXX of the condition of a sacrificial animal which was without a physical defect. It was applied to people in a moral and religious sense.[81] Christ's sacrifice (Heb 9:14) and the church as a whole (Eph 5:27) are so described. The absence of anything that would render the person unworthy of God is the idea contained in the word, and "blameless" is a good rendering of it.[82]

The issue here is how Paul is using these two terms with reference to election. The clause in which they occur expresses purpose,[83] completing the meaning of *exelexato*, but the exact meaning of the terms is debated. There are two possibilities: election has the purpose of bringing the elect to full justification, so that these terms describe the believer's position;[84] or, election has the purpose of sanctifying the elect, so that these terms describe the believer's practice.[85]

The use of εἶναι (*einai*, "might be"), as compared with γίνεσθαι (*ginesthai*, "might become"), argues for a positional sense here.[86] The statement is absolute, not progressive, since the elect will possess these characteristics and not

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[78]Markus Barth, *Ephesians, Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, in The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981) 107-8.

[79]Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 6-7.

[80]Balz, "ἅγιος κ. τ. λ.," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 1:16-17.

[81]BAGD, 47-48.

[82]Salmond, "Ephesians" 249.

[83]Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar* 214-15; Eadie, *Ephesians* 12; Ellicott, *Ephesians* 6; Meyer, *Ephesians* 313.

[84]Meyer, *Ephesians* 313-14. Although a minority view, some scholars (e.g., Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 93-94) understand the positional aspect to be final sanctification, as is clearly the case in Eph 5:27, but the context here is against that view. All the blessings are associated with initial salvation, as the subsequent discussion will prove.

[85]Abbott, *Ephesians* 7.

[86]Meyer, *Ephesians* 314.

progress toward them.[87] The contextual emphasis is on position and not practice, focusing on what God alone can provide, apart from the believer's activity.[88] The subsequent use of these terms in Eph 5:27 is clearly positional, referring to final perfection.[89] Whether ἐν ἀγάπῃ (*en agapē*, "in love") is connected to *exelexato* or *proorisas*, the positional sense is reinforced, since it is God's love that is in view.[90]

Eadie considers these terms never to be used of the believer's complete justification on the grounds that the presence of sin remains and only the due penalty for sin has been removed.[91] His objection, however, can be turned against his perspective, since, if these terms cannot describe the believer's position, which is perfect in Christ, how could they be applied to his practice which is certainly not perfect? It seems more difficult to use such a categorical statement concerning the state of the believer as a description of progressive sanctification.[92]

Colossians 1:22 is often appealed to as a parallel passage to support the progressive sanctification position since it uses both terms,[93] but it does not employ the same verbal construction, using παραστῆσαι (*parastēsai*, "to present"), and using them in a different context which has already exhorted believers to walk worthy (Col 1:10). Therefore it is not truly parallel to the Ephesians passage, but since the Colossians passage looks forward to the end result of God's salvific work,

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[87]Compare Phil 2:15 where γένησθε is used with ἄμεμπτοι and ἄμωμα in the context of the Christian life.

[88]This is not to deny the clear statements of Paul in v. 13 concerning hearing and believing, but the immediate and overall emphasis is God's activity. It remains to be seen whether they are a product of divine fiat and thus a further part of the divine blessings associated with election.

[89]Paul's use of these terms to describe Christ's presentation of the church in her final state of perfection completes the process which he has introduced in Eph 1:4. The corporate emphasis in 5:27 is appropriate since all the members of the church will participate in this glorious event at the same time. The church, for the first time, will be complete in all respects, and so is best presented as a unified whole. This provides no grounds for reading back a corporate interpretation into 1:4.

[90]It is possible to connect this phrase to ἁγίους and ἀμώμους. This is argued by Lenski (*Ephesians* 359), Westcott (*Ephesians* 9), and J. Armitage Robinson (*Commentary on Ephesians* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1903] 27). Most commentators dismiss a connection to ἐξελέξατο on the grounds that it is too remote, but Alford (*Greek Testament* 71), considers it no more remote than the previous relationship of εὐλογήσας to ἐν Χριστῷ. Others such as Meyer (*Ephesians* 314), Eadie (*Ephesians* 28-31), Abbott (*Ephesians* 8) and Ellicott (*Ephesians* 7) attach ἐν ἀγάπῃ to προορίσας. This last connection best harmonizes with the contextual emphasis, that focuses on God's activity, not man's. An opening statement concerning God's love provides a fitting motivation for His act of predestination, which in this context has adoption as its goal. Paul's other connections of ἐν ἀγάπῃ in Ephesians (3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2), although standing in an antecedent relationship to what is modified, do not militate against a differing connection here. They are remote from this context and in each case the emphasis is on the believer's actions, not those of God, which is the emphasis in 1:3-4.

[91]Eadie, *Ephesians* 22.

[92]Even if the alternative view is adopted, the believer must first be justified before he can be sanctified, and therefore God's purpose in the case of individual election must include his justification.

[93]Salmond, "Ephesians" 250.

i.e., the believer's perfection in the presence of the one who has saved him, it actually lends support to the other view. Both passages use these terms in their fullest sense of perfection, Eph 1:4 positionally at the beginning of salvation and Col 1:22 experientially at the end of salvation.

As discussed earlier, the associated term *proorisas* also has a positional goal as its focus, the adoption of the elect. God predestined the elect for the purpose of bringing them into a filial relationship with Himself, which grants each believer the position and full rights appropriate to a natural son. In addition, the subsequent blessings of redemption and forgiveness are associated with initial salvation. This understanding and emphasis fits well with the positional connotations of *hagious* and *amōmous*.

In light of the evidence, it seems best to understand *hagious* and *amōmous* in a positional sense, referring to the justification of the elect. This is critical since it defines the purpose[94] of election as including justification, which is the primary blessing leading to all others.

Thus far the discussion has sought to clarify the meaning of significant terms and concepts relating to election in Ephesians 1:3-4. There is yet one key syntactical relationship that needs to be examined in order to define completely Paul's message. This is the relationship of election to the concept of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places*," to which it is compared by the conjunction καθώς (*kathōs*, "just as"). First, one must determine the two parts in this phrase.

The Meaning of "with every spiritual blessing" (*ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ [en pasē eulogia pneumatikē]*)

The preposition *en* has an instrumental sense in this phrase, expressing the means by which believers are blessed.[95] The word for blessing, *eulogia*, is singular and combined with *pasē* has the idea of every possible blessing presented in a single package, with nothing lacking.[96] Thus, God has blessed each believer with a comprehensive spiritual package. Commentators have assigned various meanings to the spiritual aspect of the package.

Robinson and Westcott define them as spiritual (New Covenant) blessings as opposed to the earthly, material ones provided under the Old Covenant.[97] Schnackenburg and others suggest that *pneumatikē* points to the source, which is the

[94]One could understand the infinitive to indicate the idea of result, but this is much less common in the NT (Dana and Mantey, *Grammar*, 214-15).

[95]Robertson, *Word Pictures* 516-17.

[96]Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

[97]Robinson, *Ephesians* 7.

Holy Spirit.[98] Abbott and Lenski consider them to belong to the sphere of man's spirit, intended for spiritual men, as against fleshly men.[99] Salmond views them as the blessings, which belong to the sphere of spiritual activities, corresponding to the nature of the agent, God.[100]

The context contains no indication of any antithesis between these two forms of covenantal blessings,[101] and in chapter two, the OT covenantal context is used with a spiritual emphasis (vv. 11-12). If source were the primary idea, then it would be more naturally expressed by ἀπὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ (*apo tou pneumatikou*, "from the spriritual") or ἐκ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ (*ek tou pneumatikou*, "out of the spiritual").[102] Here the nature of the blessings is emphasized, not their source.

The nature of man is not in focus here, but the nature and activity of God, and there is certainly no indication of any contrast between spiritual and carnal men (such as in 1 Cor 2:14; cf. 3:1, 3). In fact the recipients, as discussed earlier, are viewed by God in their fallen state, and these blessings alter that state, transforming it into a spiritual one. It is what the blessings are by nature, not how they are received, that is in view here. This is their identifying characteristic.[103] The comprehensive blessings that God has bestowed are spiritual in nature, designed to meet the spiritual needs of the recipients.

***The Meaning of "in the heavenly* places" (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις [en tois epouraniois])**

In Ephesians, *en tois epouraniois* occurs four other times, three of which are clearly local (1:20; 2:6; 3:10), and possibly the fourth also (6:12). Here, the local sense is also best, resulting in the rendering "heavenly places," not "heavenly things,"[104] but the exact meaning of *epouraniois* is debated, even among scholars who embrace local understanding.

Eadie considers the phrase to refer to definite heavenly places where God dwells as sovereign over the earth. Westcott views them as the realm of divine or demonic activity. Salmond understands them to be a further definition of the previous spiritual blessings, describing the region in which they are found.[105]

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[98]R. Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) 50; Eadie, *Ephesians* 13-14; Meyer *Ephesians*, 311.

[99]Abbott, *Ephesians* 4; Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

[100]Salmond, "Ephesians" 246.

[101]Abbott, *Ephesians* 4.

[102]Salmond, "Ephesians" 246.

[103]Admittedly the spiritual nature of the blessings derives from their source, God, who is spirit (John 4:24), but the emphasis here is not on source.

[104]Salmond, "Ephesians" 247.

[105]Eadie, *Ephesians* 15-17; Westcott, *Ephesians* 7; Salmond, "Ephesians" 246-47.

Despite this debate, the differing views contain the primary idea of a positional sense, and combining the elements of each best captures the full meaning, since each one is true and cannot stand independent of the others. The phrase therefore further defines the spiritual blessings as being located in the spiritual realm over which God is supreme, which accounts for their effectiveness in meeting the spiritual needs of each recipient.

The Relationship to Election

The connecting conjunction *kathō*s conveys the idea of correspondence. It shows that the previous statement regarding blessing is in harmony with the subsequent one concerning election.[106] In this context it carries a modal rather than a causal idea,[107] and could be rendered "according as" or "in conformity to the fact that."[108]

This final connection supports the emphasis of a positional understanding of election. Paul presents the package of blessings as fully possessed[109] at the point of conversion,[110] which the believer has by virtue of his position in Christ. Corresponding to this is God's eternal, electing purpose, which has brought this reality to pass.

Summarizing Paul's Understanding of Election

It is now possible to summarize Paul's understanding of election as expressed by Ephesians 1:3-4. God, in eternity past, for no other reason than His own design and will, selected certain individuals out of the mass of fallen humanity to be the recipients of a comprehensive spiritual package, which includes their justification and adoption. This is an action totally free on God's part, without any external influence, which is ultimately purposed to bring praise to Himself, particularly to His grace.

Election, viewed as foreordination, also guarantees the destiny of the elect, with particular reference to adoption. Every elect person is adopted into God's family with full filial position and privileges. The historical realization of eternal election is the mystical union of the elect with Christ and only in this relationship do the elect receive the accompanying spiritual blessings also contained in their election.

There are no preconditions to election, such as a person's foreseen faith or meritorious life. In fact, the goal of election is to provide the necessary spiritual

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[106]Abbott, *Ephesians* 6.

[107]Eadie, *Ephesians* 18.

[108]Salmond, "Ephesians" 247.

[109]Lenski, *Ephesians* 352.

[110]Westcott, *Ephesians* 6.

condition for a sinner to have acceptance with God. Paul refers to the elect as those who have already benefited from their election, but God views their condition prior to all that His activity will produce. The objects of election are unbelievers, who will become believers on account of their election. In all of this, God is supreme, sovereign, and Savior.

CONCLUSION

In light of the exegetical analysis of Ephesians 1:3-4, it is apparent that this passage does not support the corporate approach to election and that it supports an individual, unconditional view of election. Men differ in this matter and yet all are recipients of God's grace. May the differences be addressed in that spirit, even as this writer has sought to do.