

WHAT ARE ELECTION AND PREDESTINATION? by Richard D. Phillips

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. How would you explain to someone the meaning of these two terms?

Election –

Predestination –

As you begin leading this study, ask the group what they wrote down before reading the booklet. Don't take too long as it will be more important to see later where they are, and how far they need to go.

2. According to Ephesians 1:4, our election took place before the foundation of the world. But when before? (6-8)

*It is hard to understand the mind of God, for God has **never** decided anything in time. He has ALWAYS known *everything*. We have been His elect in Christ from all of eternity past.*

3. Why did God elect anyone?

What we deserve is His wrath for our sin. It is only out of His eternal and infinite love He chose to call us His own.

4. Can we choose to not believe the doctrine of election? (9-11)

If this was simply a matter of what some theologians made up, then we would have a choice. But since it is what the Scripture teaches, then no, we don't have a choice. The choice we do have is to do everything we can to understand what the Bible teaches on this subject, and believing it on the basis of what we learn about God.

5. How should the doctrine of election make you *feel* about yourself? (11-12)

It should make you feel thankful! But not on the basis of anything you did or anything that was worth saving in you. God did all He did solely on the basis of His loving and sovereign grace.

6. What is God's purpose in electing us? (12-14)

Read Eph. 1:4 again to the group. We are chosen to be holy and blameless before Him. This is the work of the Holy Spirit making us holy.

7. What confidence, or what sense of security, can we gain from the doctrine of election? (14-17)

Read Phil.1:6: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (NIV) Also read 2:12-13. Show them our part in salvation and God's purpose in completing it.

8. Before reading this booklet, define what you believe the word *predestination* means. (19-20) Keep in mind what we already know about God – He is love. How does His love fit with what you think predestination means?
Assure the class that if they haven't already come to appreciate this doctrine by the time they finished reading the booklet, that they should be by the time you finish with this session. If you need help, call in your pastor.
9. When did God begin to *foreknow* or *predetermine* anything? (20-22)
Tie this to question #2. God has never learned anything or had to come to a decision. He has **always**, through all eternity, known **everything**. The language He uses here is to help us, since everything we know and do happens *in time*. But for God, this never happened. We have been elect and predestined since eternity past.
10. Do you, as a human being, have “free will?” (23-25)
Make it clear, before this question can be answered, “free” must always first be defined as to its limits and parameters. *No one* is absolutely free! Even God does not have absolute free will. God cannot lie or contradict Himself. Our human freedom must also be defined as to what we are actually free to do. We are “free” to choose God, BUT, that is only because He has first chosen us and His Spirit has already changed our heart from one of stone to one of flesh.
11. How can we believe in a sovereign God and also believe man has the ability to make a choice? (23-15)
Read Deuteronomy 29:29 to the group. This verse teaches us God is sovereign and man does have the responsibility to choose. Packer calls this an antinomy¹ – “a seeming contradiction resolvable only in the mind of God.” How do we reconcile sovereignty and free will? Packer says: “You never have to reconcile friends.”
12. What would happen to all mankind if God had not elected and predestined? (26-27)
We would all get what we deserve – Hell! We would still be part of our old family – Satan and the unsaved. No one has the ability to come to God on his/her own. Paul adds that no one left to his or her own desires will even seek God. (Romans 3:11)

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

In Romans 1:18-21 we read:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...For what can be known about God is plain to them...For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. [ESV]

If you or I were writing this, we would probably have finished this by saying, *they did not honor him as God or obey him*. It is *thanks* God desires from us. So then, if you are not in the habit of always giving thanks to God for each and everything He has done for us and given to us, then make a plan now to live a life of thankfulness. It makes such a difference.

For Further Study

Election and Free Will, Robert Peterson. P&R Publishing, 2007.
The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Loraine Boettner. P&R Publishing.

Find this and more at www.pcabookstore.com.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, IVP, 1962, chapter 2.