

Below is a short exegetical commentary over Ephesians 1:4 submitted by Brian H. Wagner, PhD, Professor of Theology, Church History, and Biblical Languages at Virginia Baptist College:

7 Reasons from Context & Grammar Showing Eph 1:4 Teaches Corporate Future Blessing ... not Divine Individual Election

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1. The context is a description of spiritual blessings for those in Christ, who Himself is already seated in the heavenlies. The emphasis is therefore forward looking, not backward concerning God's purpose. Other terms in this context (1:3-14, "inheritance", "fullness of times") confirm this future emphasis. The future blessing itemized in 1:4 is to be holy and without blame before God in the heavenlies with Christ in the future.
2. The grammar of the complementary infinitive – εἶναι – "to be" must not be disconnected in thought from the main verb – ἐξελέξατο – "were chosen". The blessing is not being chosen to be in Christ before the foundation of the world, but the blessing to be chosen in Christ to be holy and without blame in the future.
3. The grammar (semantic meaning) of "in Christ" is crucial to this context and to this passage. The spiritual body of Christ is made up of all believers who were added to it by the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:13). One cannot be in Christ, that is "in Him" before being added to that body by the Holy Spirit. See Rom 9:25 where before being in Christ is clearly called "not My people" and "not beloved".
4. The context (delimitations) follows the thread – "in Christ" (vs 3), "in him" (vs 4, 9 & 11), "in the beloved one" (vs 6), "in whom" (vs 7, 11, & 13). These point clearly to Paul's closing description of how one becomes "sealed... until the redemption of the purchased possession" in the body of Christ by the Spirit of promise. One is "sealed" in Christ when one has heard the gospel and has believed it (1:13).
5. The grammar (semantic meaning) of "us" therefore in 1:4 must be anachronistic. No individuals or group of persons existed before the foundation of the world to be chosen between except the members of the Godhead. It is understandable that

promises made to one of those members would benefit any who would later be joined to Him spiritually, that is to His spiritual body.

A future member of that body could say anachronistically that they were chosen in Christ before creation to receive that fulfillment of those same promises made to Christ back then. It would be like a Christian Jew saying, “I was chosen in Abraham before Israel was a nation to dwell in Israel in the Millennium with Abraham.” He would be speaking anachronistically, with no thought of his identity as an individual being chosen to be Abraham when Abraham received that original promise.

6. The grammar (semantic delimitation) of “before the foundation of the world” which is a terminus ad quem (limit to which), denotes a finish line of the activity of the main verb/infinitive thought in 1:4, and it should not be confused with the NT use of “from the foundation of the world” which is a terminus a quo (limit from which), that is, a starting line of activity discussed where that phrase is found. The verses stating “before” creation in the NT, like this one, relate only to activities of the individuals within the Godhead (John 17:3, 2Tim 2:9, Titus 1:2, 1Peter 1:20). The verses stating “from” creation in the NT all relate to activities that began after creation, like adding names to the Lamb’s Book of Life (inferred in Rev 13:8, 17:8). The Greek preposition – απο – always means “from” or “since” and never “before.” The Greek preposition – προ – always means “before” either of time or rank.

7. The context (rational concept) of individuals being chosen before creation who do not yet exist in reality requires a definition of how they existed in God’s mind in order to be chosen there in His mind. One option is to be known in His mind as an eternally set group of individual lives (like biographies) which include all God’s interaction also as eternally set. This, however, makes any concept of “choice” an anthropomorphic expression, since no life was previously unchosen and then chosen. And no forethought would have preceded that “choice”, and God could not express free will to make choices into the future forever.

A second option is to be known in His mind and infinite understanding as a possible group of individual lives (like cans of playdoh), which allows God’s free will to be expressed as a potter (cf. Jer 18:1-11) interacting with each according to a plan which includes a destiny for all who responsibly submit to or reject His grace to form them into vessels of mercy. This verse, 1:4, speaks about the destiny of those who have submitted by trusting the Gospel and have then been joined to Christ who

was promised before creation a destiny for Himself and those joined to Him, in Him.

The Scripture, with all its subjunctive/conditional statements, all its universal invitations and warnings, and all its verses clearly declaring that God is still making choices and determinations contextually supports the second option. The first option can only be true if all of God's self-revelation in Scripture is viewed as truly analogical (a comparison with no true connection to reality), whereas the second option views Scripture as truly univocal (giving true meaning in connection to reality).

If Calvinists have as many contextual/grammatical reasons for the idea of divine individual election before creation being taught in this verse, let them show the evidence. They will also need to explain further how individuals existed before creation in God's mind without affirming that God will never exercise His free will in their lives into the future forever. And they will need to explain how His choice was actually made, without affirming that such an expression is anthropomorphic/analogical for God has not actually made any choices. If they do affirm that God no longer expresses His freedom of will in making choices and that God's self-revelation in Scripture is mostly anthropomorphic/analogical, they will need to explain why God did not state this more clearly in the Scripture but needed future scholars to reveal this truth about Him after Scriptures were completed.

I do not hold as necessary to show exegetical confirmation by other scholars of what I just presented, but it can be helpful for those who ask, "Did the Holy Spirit lead others to affirm this interpretation based on normal context and grammar?" So on biblehub.com, here are exegetical Commentaries by some who though they hold, by theological bias in my opinion, to individual election as being taught in this verse, they do recognize the grammatical legitimacy of the corporate election view! See comments by Alford, Lange, Meyer, Moule (Cambridge Bible), and Salmond (Expositor's Greek).