

What a great joy adoption is. A couple desires to have children. They decide to adopt a child who needs the love and parenting that this couple can provide. What a wonderful match!

A child is homeless and helpless. She is cared for in an orphanage that provides for her the best that it can. But nothing can substitute for a loving home and nurturing parents as she grows up and matures. Adoption provides what every child needs.

My son-in-law is adopted. He knows firsthand the joy and security of adoption. Some adopted children have an understandable need to find their birth parents. Brian has never felt that need. He says, "My adoptive parents are my real parents." They provided everything he needed in their newly created family.

The "A" in F.A.I.T.H. stands for "**Adopted by God**" (Traditionally **Unconditional Election**). Even as a human couple chooses to adopt a child and welcomes that child into their family, God our heavenly Father makes a deliberate choice to adopt certain people and welcome them as adopted children into his family.

The apostle Paul writes about this spiritual adoption in his letter to the Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.... In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:3-6, 11-12, NRSV).

Notice God's activity in choosing us even before he created the world: "He chose us ... before the foundation of the world ... He destined us for adoption as his children...." Some people call this the doctrine of election (a.k.a. Unconditional Election). The biblical teaching of election appears throughout the Bible. Here are some examples:

- God selected Abram out of all the people on earth to make a covenant with him. God promised Abram that he would make a great nation out of him "and all peoples on earth will be blessed" through him (Gen. 12:1-3).
- The Old Testament Israelites are God's chosen people. "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. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, ... [but] because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:6-8).
- God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint his chosen one as king over Israel: "Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Sam. 16:1).
- Jesus specifically selected his apostles. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last" (John 15:16).
- The apostle Paul explained to the church of the Thessalonians that they were chosen: "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

- Likewise the apostle Peter: “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election” (2 Pet. 1:10).
- Jesus says of the end times, “If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matt. 24:22).

Acts 13 is another passage that teaches about God’s choosing or electing. Here the apostle Paul has been preaching to the Jewish people, and after resistance from some of them, begins to preach the message of salvation to the Gentiles. Acts 13:48 records the Gentile’s reaction: “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.” Who believed? Those who were appointed for eternal life.

The Bible teaches that God has elected those who will be saved. That much is clear. The debate has been: On what basis did God elect those whom he chose? Why did he choose some and not others? Did they have to meet certain conditions in order to be chosen? These are common questions.

Most people think that if they are good enough, God will accept them. The problem is that no one is good enough. We understand God’s election to be unconditional, without qualifications. God did not say: “I will let you be one of my children if you are a very good person, or if you are attractive, or if you earn a minimum annual salary.” Notice in the case of Israel that God specifically said that he did not choose them because they were the largest nation but simply because he loved them. It is the heart of an adopting parent reaching out to a needy child.

Another common idea about election is that God picked his chosen people based on their faith. It would be as if God looked into the future, saw who would believe, and then chose them. Did God elect them before they had faith or because they had faith? The Bible says that although the elect were dead in their sins – and therefore incapable of exercising faith – God chose to adopt them through Christ into his family.

Why didn’t everyone who saw Jesus believe in Jesus? “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me.... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me.... For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life....’” (John 6:35-40).

It is certainly true that “everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life....” But who is able to look to the Son and believe in him if all people are completely dead in their trespasses and sins? The answer: “All those the Father gives” to Jesus.

When Romans 8:29-30 is misread, it sounds like election is based on foreseen faith: “For 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.”

Those who favor election based on God’s foreknowledge interpret “foreknew” in this passage to mean that God knows who would have faith throughout history, and then chooses them because of their faith. These people met the condition of having faith. However, the word “know” in the Bible is often used in the sense of knowing intimately – i.e., loving. Consequently, those whom God foreloved God predestined. Our election comes simply from God’s love and mercy, not by way of our meeting the condition of faith.

In summary, Christians are adopted by God, entirely as a result of God’s love and mercy, not because of good works or even faith. It is God’s sovereign choice.