

# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

The extravagant and sad life of Julius Caesar is chronicled by the historian, Suetonius. Julius was driven by his insatiable desire to be like Alexander the Great, and his lust to conquer could not be controlled. He treasured the speed by which he destroyed the enemy, and he loved to display his inscription in Latin: “*I came, I saw, I conquered.*” Suetonius said, “He had more gold than he knew what do with,” and his lust for power and money also drew him into gross immorality—neither male nor female was safe in his presence. However, this world-leader died by the stab wounds of his “friends.” He died as he lived: “God was not in his thoughts.” A few decades later, Jesus declared, “For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” Let us choose wisely.



**Ben & Carissa Smith** (MDiv, 2005)  
Lead Pastor | Engleside Baptist Church | Alexandria, VA

## Alumni Spotlight: Ben Smith (MDiv, 2005)

Pastor Ben Smith was prepared to head to seminary . . . somewhere. While in college, he was exposed to the faculty of VBTS and its grace philosophy of ministry. After being challenged by what he heard, Ben decided to study for ministry in Virginia Beach. Also, while at college, he met his wife of nearly twenty years, Carissa. The couple has been blessed with four children.

After graduating from VBTS in 2005, Ben was called by Engleside Baptist Church in Alexandria, VA to be their youth pastor. He was drawn to this role because of the opportunity to serve under Senior Pastor Brad Lapiska, whom Ben describes as “an experienced, humble leader who would take the strong foundation of my education and help me flesh that out in real-time ministry.”

When Pastor Lapiska retired in 2018, Engleside called Ben to be their senior pastor. He believes that his time at VBTS equipped him with a passion for God and the Scripture, which has allowed him to thrive for the Lord in this role. Ben’s desire is to love God, the people in his assembly, and the lost in the local community. God bless you, Ben and Carissa as you labor in His service!

## *Musing on the Mysterious Doctrine of Election*

### **Ephesian 1:4, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”**

The history of the doctrine of election is filled with debate and censorship. One side proposes the Bible teaches election to be *unconditional* because God alone chooses who is to be saved, and that is that! However, the other side refuses to back down and just as adamantly declares that election is *conditioned* upon man’s spontaneous choice for salvation—man is not a robot! Both sides appeal to scriptural passages, and both sides deem the other’s position a compromise of truth. At the heart of this argument, *of which both sides agree*, are statements like Paul’s: “you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). To put this in a question: How is it possible for a dead person to respond to the gospel of God? Both sides propose remedies, but their solutions have not brought a consensus. So how can we make sense of this? While I cannot develop a flawless answer for you, I ask you to muse with me upon three foundational concepts, which ought to mark any discussion of this doctrine.

**First, the doctrine of election is mysterious because it is rooted in God.** Our great Creator God exists without fault or confusion: “His ways are perfect and right; He is a faithful God who does no wrong” (Deut. 32:4). The Scripture also declares him to be “rich in knowledge and wisdom” (Rom. 11:33), so that he acts without the need of a counsellor (Isa. 40:13–14). Little wonder, then, the first book of the Bible declares God’s judgments and ways to be “unfathomable” and “wonderful”—“Who can ever say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” (Job 9:10–12). Therefore, when we consider the divine doctrine of election, we cannot view God as our equal. Rather, we approach the God who elects as our perfect Superior who operates with wisdom and mercy in the best interests of his creation. This humble mindset produces “a voice of joy in awe of him” (Ps. 47:1) and keeps our words and actions in check (Rom. 9:20–21).

**Second, divine election happened before time.** This makes election mysterious to humans. Our minds cannot comprehend any activity or emotion before matter and time were created. For example, Jesus prays to the Father and says, “Glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was” (Jn. 17:5); and again, “You loved me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24). When preaching, Jesus said, “Come . . . inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). Election is also presented by the Scripture in the same way, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). Though the timing of God’s salvation decree amazes us, it does not disturb us—this is our God! His ways are eternal, and his activities are filled with the goodness of his nature (Ps. 100:5; 106:1–2).

**Third, God’s election and man’s decision are not irreconcilable differences.** Rather than doubting God’s ways, we marvel that his election, and our decision to trust his redemptive plan, are not incompatible realities. Sovereign election and human decision function like God’s “predetermined plan” to provide his Son as a sacrifice for our sin, but “godless men” murdered him by “nailing the hands” of Jesus to the cross (Acts 2:23). Both God’s purpose and man’s will are in play, without the cancellation of either. So also with our salvation: God chose us before time began, but salvation occurred when we confessed him as Lord (Rom. 10:9). Jesus modeled this twin concept in his ministry, and we rejoice! — “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (Jn. 6:37).