

Ephesians #3 – Chosen in Christ

Ephesians - GIW

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Bible Text: Ephesians 1:4-6
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Passage which is found in Ephesians 1:4-6.

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

I remind you again that this letter was written to the saints of God and the saints of God are people who have been made righteous in Jesus Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit and that's why he also calls them the faithful in Christ Jesus. The saints of God are the faithful in Christ Jesus and he's writing to them to tell them about the heavenly blessings, the spiritual blessings in heavenly realms that they have in Christ Jesus and one of those spiritual blessings that we have in heavenly places is the amazing, the astounding fact that God has chosen us in Christ from before the foundation of the world. Now just imagine that here was this pagan city of Ephesus, it was the center of one of the great false religions of the ancient world, the worship of Diana of the Ephesians. I can still remember when I was over in southern France that I saw one of the ancient temples of Diana still standing so this was a great and powerful religion at that time in the ancient world. And right in the midst of that city largely devoted to all of the commerce involved with that false religion, there was a people of God, a church of the Lord Jesus Christ planted right in that place and the reason for that is that those people were chosen in Christ Jesus from before the foundation of the world.

Now brothers and sisters, there's only one way in which we can approach a subject like this in the Bible and that is with minds and hearts that are willing to hear what God says and willing to put away preconceived ideas and notions that are in opposition to the word of God in order that we might think his thoughts after him because the Bible says his thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways. As high as heaven is above the earth, so are his ways above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts. To begin with, then, we just take note of the fact that we, as the saints of God, are chosen in Christ Jesus. If you're a saint and if you are faithful in Jesus Christ, then this is the ultimate reason and for many people this above everything else there is in the entire Bible is what

you might call a hard saying because the natural man doesn't like to think that someone else other than himself has his destiny in hand. The natural man by nature likes to think that he himself is the Sovereign over his own ultimate destiny and so he likes to think that the ultimate choice is the one he makes and yet the Bible says, no, it isn't that way. Romans 9, the Apostle Paul says, "It does not depend on man's desire or effort." In the ultimate explanation of the salvation of sinners, we have to say that it is God who determined it from before the foundation of the world when he chose us in Jesus Christ.

Now that's a tremendous statement when you stop and think about it. Before there was ever a man in the garden of Eden, before there was any temptation of our first parents, before there was any sin and fall and all the devastation that has followed from it, before any of that God chose his people in Christ for eternal salvation. And in order that we might not miss it, in order that we might not misunderstand it, he piles on the expressions throughout this passage. You know, John Calvin is usually blamed for inventing the doctrine of predestination and election but I've read a lot of John Calvin, the "Institutes" and the commentaries of this great Reformer, and I never have heard him say anything so high and exalted and to man's pretensions devastating as what Paul says right here in the first chapter of Ephesians. Far beyond anything that John Calvin ever wrote is the majesty and the awesomeness of this statement in Ephesians 1.

"He chose us in him before the creation of the world. He predestined us to be adopted," that's in verse 5. And again you read a little bit later on, "he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment." Verse 11, "In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Indeed in such a short compass I know of nothing comparable to this great chapter in Ephesians. Over and over and over again he tells us that God Almighty is sovereign, that he has a plan, that he's working out everything according to that plan, and that part of that plan is that he has chosen us in Christ to be his people forever.

Well, that's the teaching of Ephesians 1. That's the teaching of God's holy word, the Bible. It teaches his sovereign election of some to everlasting life, and right away we ask, "Well, why? If we are God's elect, why were we chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world?" Well, our text says that this was in love. Now you look at the translations, you'll notice that the words "In love" there have been a problem for the translators. They don't know quite whether to put the words "In love" with the preceding or with the succeeding statement, whether he chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight in love, and in that case the "In love" refers to our being holy and blameless and that makes good sense because the Bible says love is the fulfillment of the law, and if we're going to be holy and blameless it's going to be because we act in love to do what our Father says. But many of the translations put it the way the New International Version does and that is to put a period after "sight" and then say "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons." And in any event, it certainly is true that God predestined us, he adopted us, he chose us in love, and in the Bible the word

"love" used here, agape love, is always that love that has its explanation not in the one who is love but in the one who does the loving.

Why did God love you? Well, we always want an explanation for that but, you know, in a certain sense there really is no explanation because there's not a thing in you that's lovable by nature. Not a thing. That's what the Bible teaches. If God looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did seek God or who did good and he couldn't see even one, if the Bible is telling the truth when it says every thought of the intent of man's heart was only evil continually, if the Bible is right when it says man is dead in sin and that man drinks iniquity like he drinks water, then how in the world could God look down upon this world and see anything in man that would evoke his love? That's just not the teaching of scripture. Love in the Bible, the highest love, agape love is always which has its explanation in the one who loves. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Why, was the world so wonderful? Was the world so lovable, so lovely? Not at all. That's the amazing thing about it, it's the fact that God loved the world even though it wasn't lovable and wasn't attracting and there was nothing worthwhile about it. We all know I hope by now that God could have destroyed the whole thing and there would have been no injustice done at all. In fact, God offered that option to Moses once. "Let me destroy the whole lot of them and we'll start over." Moses interceded with God and he interceded on the basis of his completely unmerited favor.

There was nothing in the Israelites for the sake of which God chose them. No, the only reason that God chose them, the only reason that God chose you or me, the only possible reason is his own sovereign good pleasure, and that's why he could say and did say in his holy word, the Bible, "Jacob I loved. Esau I hated." It's an amazing thing that God could love Jacob. You read the story of Jacob and Esau, you almost jump to the conclusion that if you had to choose between them you'd rather have Esau. But God chose Jacob. Not because there was anything good in that scheming supplanter because there wasn't, but because it was in love that he predestined us for the adoption and that means that the only explanation for God's sovereign election is found in the inward nature of God, in the mysterious depths of the divine being, and I'm not able to explain it and I've never read the writings of any theologian who is able to explain it. Nobody can understand the depths of the wisdom and the knowledge and the nature of God. Nobody can plumb to the depths and say, "Well, here is the reason why." All we know is this, that the one and only reason why God chose any man out of the human race to be saved arises from something within himself. It's not something in them. "For who made you to differ," says the apostle, "who made you to differ that you are one of God's chosen ones?" Well, it certainly wasn't you. It was God and only God who did it and he did it for the praise of his own glorious grace.

Now that might humble you a little and it might even shock you a little but the truth is that God's great work of redemption ultimately isn't just so that people will be saved, the ultimate end of all of God's works is higher than that. Nothing in God's great work of redemption is ultimately man-centered. You might think it is but it isn't. No, everything that God has done including his election of some in Christ before the foundation of the

world to be redeemed forever, even that, the ultimate end in that is his own glory. That's what he's really aiming at as his highest and ultimate goal to reveal to the preachers his own transcendent glory and majesty so that, because of the greatness of what he has done, he might be praised and adored and magnified through endless ages by his creatures who he has redeemed.

Your salvation, let me put it this way, is a means to an end. Your salvation is not what the universe is all about. It's important but that's not what the universe is all about. It's only a means to an end. That's all it is. You're a creature and if you are one of God's chosen ones, thank God and praise him for it but that's really so that he might be praised throughout all the endless ages for the great and wonderful thing that he has done. You're not going to be praised for it, he is. You're not going to get the glory forever and ever, he is. I remember before I became convinced that the Psalms were the proper vehicle of worship of God, we used to have a song, "O that will be glory for me, glory for me. O that will be glory for me." It went on and on and on like that and now I think could I ever have sung such a dreadful song? No, it will be glory for God, not glory for me because all of the works of God, the ultimate end of them is his glory.

And the purpose of it is, as you see here in our text, that we might live godly lives to his praise. For if I am elect from all eternity, you often hear the objection, "Well, then I can live just as I please and I'll still get there, won't I?" Well, just look at our text because you can see plainly that that is contradicted by what the apostle says, "he chose us in him before the creation of the world," for what? "To be holy and blameless in his sight." And that means that God's election is election to sanctification. That's one of the clearest things you'll find in the entire Bible, and don't forget he wrote this to the saints who are also the faithful. In other words, if you have the idea that a man can be elect and not be sanctified and not put on more and more in this life holiness, and perfect that holiness in the fear of God, if you think that a man can be chosen by God to eternal life and reach heaven without himself being more and more transformed by the renewing of his mind so that he's no longer conformed to this age but he is renewed after the image of Christ, then you've got a wrong idea because God has chosen his people to be holy and without blame before him in love and one of the clearest things that you see throughout the Bible is the evidence of this in the lives of the saints.

Now you pick your saint, I'll pick mine, anyone you want out of the Bible. You can pick Job or Abraham or David or Solomon, any one of them. Now first thing you can say about them is, "Ah, I can find fault with him. I can tell you what he did wrong. I can show you where he really stumbled and fell flat on his face in doing what was wrong." That's true. Look at Abraham, he lies about Sarah. Noah, he gets drunk. You can point out one after another, all of these great saints of God. Peter, he denies Jesus. And I could say the same about every saint who has ever lived but do you know something? If you look at their life in its totality, if you look at the course of their life from beginning to end and you see what's happening in those people, what you really see is a constant movement out of death into life, out of conformity to the age into conformity with Christ. They are becoming holy and without blame before him in love. They are striving to keep the commandments of God and they are striving to become sanctified people. And indeed

when you really look at the life of a man like Jacob, that lying deceiver, that man who supplanted his brother by tricking his father, and then you look at that man's life as it unfolds toward the end where he's down there in the land of Egypt leaning on his staff and blessing his children, why you just can hardly believe the transformation that's taken place. He really is a saint and he really is faithful in Christ Jesus, and the Bible says that that's the way it is with all who are chosen in Christ.

Now some of you people are farmers and you ought to be able to understand this. Let us say for argument's sake that God has ordained and predestined that you're going to have the greatest harvest you've ever had this year. Well, I'm here to tell you that if that's the case, he has also predestined and foreordained that you're going to get out there when spring really hits and plant your crop. Absolutely, I can guarantee that that's part of his plan. And you're going to take care of it and you're going to cultivate it, and you're going to take daily concern over it until the day of harvest. Then you're going to go out there and you're going to harvest it and God's predestined will is going to come to pass. And it is exactly the same with his people. If you were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, then it is an absolute certainty that you're going to start having an interest in the Bible and you're going to start changing your way of life from conformity to the world to conformity to the will of God, and you're going to put on holiness without which no man can see the Lord. You're going to be sanctified. The Bible says without sanctification, not just justification, without sanctification no man shall see the Lord. Now you have to be justified, you have to be washed with the blood of Jesus, but you also have to be sanctified, renewed more and more by the Holy Spirit of God as you die unto sin and live unto righteousness. "For this is the will of God," says Paul, "even our sanctification."

Well, that's the teaching of this passage, that God from all eternity before he even created man out of the mass of the fallen human race, he chose some to eternal life in Christ Jesus not because they deserved it but because of his own sovereign good pleasure, and he did it for the praise and the glory of his own grace. Now I think you'll agree when I say that this is hardly heard anymore in the churches. Do you know that just about every Protestant church in America today at one time held essentially the same credal truth that I read for you this morning. It was there in the teaching of those churches and today it is hardly even mentioned, and when it is mentioned it is usually with an all-out attack. I remember hearing just a few years ago the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart calling this teaching a doctrine of demons. He was condemning it as a horrible and terrible thing, the very thing that Paul teaches at the beginning of this great letter to the Ephesians Christians he condemns. And I've read in literature in this modern era that even in some Reformed churches today election isn't preached, and there are even some who say it can't be preached because it's far too humbling to man and too upsetting to his way of thinking and it is therefore counterproductive. But I say to you that the number 1 thing that a lot of people in this world need today is for God to upset them, and nowhere is this need greater than to challenge the false assumption that they have that they are the master of their own fate, that they are in charge of their own destiny, and that they have a right equal to the right of any other man to eternal salvation.

The fact is that no man has any right whatsoever. If you want to say that we're equal in that regard, fine. Start there and you can't go wrong. We none of us deserve any mercy whatsoever from God. You deny the fall if you deny that. You deny the wickedness of your own heart if you deny that. There is no man on the face of the earth that deserves any mercy whatsoever from God. Deny that and you've denied the fall and you've even denied that there is any urgent necessity for God to send Jesus Christ to this world. And what a lot of people today really need to hear is this very unpleasant truth that they are dead in trespasses and sins, worthy of nothing but to be cast out and destroyed by God, and that therefore their only hope, their only possible hope is in the sovereign decree of divine election. Let me put it this way: the doctrine of election has a horrible sound in the ears of any sinner deceived about his own condition. As long as I think well of myself to some degree, as long as I have in any way a high opinion of myself, this truth is going to be very negatively received in my mind and heart. But if I ever come to realize my condition before God, what it really is by nature, do you know something? It's going to start to sound good. If a man is going down for the third and last time, this is it, well, you know, it doesn't sound so back then if he hears somebody crying out to him, "I'll have mercy on you if you'll let me do exactly as I please with you." When a man is going down the third time, he's not going to argue, he's not going to complain if somebody else has the final say over the way that he is to be saved.

And that's the way it is with the sinner before a sovereign and holy God and so I've come to love the doctrine of election. I don't hate it anymore. I once did. I can still remember that day when we first heard this truth from Professor John Gerstner at Pittsburgh-Xenia and I can still remember how in a moment's time a class of 43 young men were in an absolute uproar, they were so infuriated, so exasperated in hearing of their own nothingness and the sovereignty of God that I was convicted in my heart and I came to realize that that was true. And I looked back on my own experience and I realized I wasn't searching for God. To the contrary, I was fleeing from him, trying to hide the fact of his existence, trying to deny the very things the Bible says about him. And so I had to ask myself the question what was it, then, that brought me to begin to fear eternal damnation? Why was it that I could hear the storm of God's wrath approaching and the other people there couldn't hear it? And why did I at last cry out to God for his mercy when the others were not even moved to concern themselves about it? Why did it happen to me and not my older brother and not my younger brother? Why? Well, I can tell you one thing, brothers and sisters, it wasn't because I was better than they were. Not at all. That I can assure you. The only reason, the only possible reason is that God decided to have mercy and for some reason I don't comprehend, I can't work it out, he chose me for eternal salvation. Then I can read the Bible and I can understand the story of Jacob and Esau, and I can understand the difference between Isaac and his brother Ishmael. Why such a difference between those two brothers? Why such a difference between me and my brothers? Is it something in me? It is not something in me, it is something in God and to deny that would be to rob God of his glory. If I pretended that somehow it came from myself, well, in my heart I know it didn't, I would really be robbing God of his glory and taking it for myself.

So far from being a burden to me, far from being one of the hard teachings of the Bible to me, I regard this as one of the precious and blessed truths of God's word and it is a truth that has put a song in my heart of praise to my Creator. Even though I didn't deserve it, yet God's eye has been upon me from all eternity, what a staggering thought. Even before I was conceived in my mother's womb, I was already a part of God's great redemptive plan in Christ. Already I was marked out as one of those to be incorporated in Christ in his great redemptive work for whom he came, for whom he bled and died and rose again, and for me to dislike that truth would be the same as to deny my own salvation and to bite the hand that has fed me with the bread of life.

Well, let me ask you how do you feel about predestination? Do you like it that God can choose one of your children and reject another? Or do you hate it? I used to hate it but I don't anymore, and the reason I don't is because I've come to terms with the condition of man before a holy God, and when I've come to see that, I don't argue with it anymore and I don't object to it. If it pleases God to save one and not another, what's that to me and why should I object? I say to you, then, there is nothing in the whole word of God more awesome than this chapter right here in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and we do not begin to realize the magnitude of the spiritual blessings that we have in heavenly places until we begin to think about those things. We ought to think about it. Why do you think it's here in the Bible? It's here so we can think about it and be staggered and overwhelmed by the fact that if we are in Christ, it is because God chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

If you're a child of God, then there's a sense in which you have always had a place in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Always. That's what we mean by eternal election. That's what we mean by being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. And what you need more than anything else in your daily life is to think about these great heavenly blessings. Why are you so little moved by the Christian faith? I'll tell you why, it's because you don't understand it, and it's because you don't think biblically. That's why you're half dead and unmoved. But if you would start to realize the real situation and what it has meant that God has had mercy upon you from all eternity planning to include you in the redemption that is in Christ, then you're going to begin to really exalt and rejoice and be thankful and praise God and live a life of gratitude, and be humble and be willing to hear his word and to obey it and to do the things that he asks you to do. As it says in Psalm 65, "How blessed the man thou chooseth and brings near to thee, that in thy courts forever his dwelling place may be. We shall within thy temple, be wholly satisfied and filled with all the goodness thy sacred courts provide."

What a wonderful thing it is to be one of God's elect and how it ought to constrain from our hearts everlasting grace and adoration and thankfulness that he took mercy upon us. May God grant that it shall be so. Amen.

We pray, heavenly Father, that by your Holy Spirit's testimony the truth of your word might be confirmed in our hearts. Make us see, O God, what we are by nature that we might begin to also understand and be overwhelmed as we understand what it means to be made new by your unmerited favor and grace in Christ Jesus. And help us to start to

think of the great enormity and the great sweep from eternity to eternity of your thoughts about us in Christ Jesus. May we thus, O Lord, be raised up out of our lethargy to live a life of thankfulness and fervent devotion in your name. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.