

The Sovereign Purpose and Plan of God in Salvation

By Jeff Noblit

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Well, let's go to Ephesians this morning. I decided that since I will not be preaching to you for about a month or so that I wanted to leave you with the word that focuses quite heavily on the glories of our Lord and on our salvation. Uh, our study in 2 Timothy is getting real close to the end. We'll see how that goes when we get back together. This morning, Ephesians 1, I want to look at verses 3 through 8, alright? Ephesians 1:3 through 8, and once again, I will not be unpacking everything that's here, but I will be interpreting everything that's here in the context of all that is here, okay? We don't wanna just pick stuff out of the Bible and run away with it, we want to pick stuff out and interpret it in the flow of the context in which it's written.

Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 3, Paul writes.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight

I've been titled this exposition "The Sovereign Purpose and Plan of God in Salvation." The sovereign purpose and plan of God in salvation. Let's talk about sovereignty again for a moment. I, it's one of those words that we hold to and we treasure, but you need to stop sometimes and think on just what all does this mean that God is sovereign?

Well, first of all, we can't fully grasp all of it. I certainly cannot accurately articulate all that's involved, but let's take a stab at it. Being sovereign means you have supremacy. Supreme rank, power or authority. Sovereign or sovereignty means you are preeminent. There's nothing compared to you. You are indisputable. You are above all others in all excellence and in character and in certainly in importance. Being sovereign means you are always and only efficacious. Efficacious is a word that means everything you initiate, you complete it perfectly. God's sovereign. He never initiated anything he did not bring

to an absolute perfect end. He accomplished exactly what he set out to accomplish. And by the way, that includes salvation and that includes his building of his church. After all, it is for him and he wouldn't leave that halfway done, would he? Being sovereign means one is holy. I might even use the word radically independent. In other words, a Sovereign is not influenced by any outside person or thing or event. They act solely on their own, by their own desire according to their own will. God is sovereign.

There is and always has been only one truly sovereign being, and that is God. God is sovereign in right, in other words, it's only and can be truly fully right that he is sovereign. If he's God, he's sovereign, if he's not sovereign, he's not God. He's sovereign in power. He has all power and authority. He's sovereign in wisdom. He has all wisdom. There's nothing he lacks. He has wisdom to do whatever he pleases over his creation and, again, is influenced by no other. Everything that was, everything that is, everything that will be is dictated and completely controlled by God's sovereign hand.

Now we have those in every age who revile and rage and rebel and shake their fist as if they are their own authority and they're their final ruler, and they'll decide for themselves what's good and bad, and they'll decide for themselves what's right and wrong. You know how the sovereign God feels about that? Psalm 115:3, "our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Psalm 2:4 says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs." You might as well be a flea attacking an elephant because he is the sovereign one.

So let's talk about the sovereign one and, you know, that's what we love about God so much is he's totally, radically, infinitely unlike us, hallelujah and Amen. He's not like us. He's, he's not like us, but just, uh, but a higher, better version of us. He's holy in that he's radically different and superior and unlike us, but through Christ and the Scriptures, we begin in this lifetime to learn of who he is and who he truly is. That's a great joy and a privilege. Men do not even know they need to learn of God until the new birth comes, and they're given new appetites and new affections and new desires to learn of and know about God.

Well, let's note, number one in our outline, let's notice that in concerning the sovereign purpose and plan of the Father in salvation, number one, he picked his own. How else would salvation occur if a sovereign God is saving people? Just stop right there. Don't move from that. How else could it happen if he's truly sovereign which includes he's effectual or efficacious, he, he can only complete what he starts to perform. He's going to save a people for himself, his church. He cannot do that part way or halfway and it's not dependent in any way on man or any other force or being to determine how he completes his church because he's sovereign. I sometimes wonder if some preachers who put God up here and put man pretty high, but maybe not quite to God, and God depends on us to make sure people get saved and God depends on us to make sure the church gets to heaven full and complete, I wonder just how big is their God? Just who is he? And is he sovereign at all?

He says in verse 4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Now, when were you chosen for salvation? Before the salvation of the world. Now in the

Greek, that phrase "before the salvation of the world" literally means before the salvation of the world. That's what it means. You say, "Pastor, I can't wrap my mind around that," and if you're new around here and you haven't heard this kind of preaching, first of all, somebody's been skimming over a lot of Bible verses because it's just clearly here. And one way to think about this is God's word often puts us in large sections of Scripture where primarily the viewpoint is God's viewpoint. It's, it's, it's the viewpoint from God's perspective. Then occasionally the Bible will turn around and, and it'll give us man's perspective. That's why we would look at a person, say you must repent, you must believe, you must come to Christ, you're responsible to do that. But this section of Scripture, and by the way, this is the same church Paul left Timothy to pastor, the church at Ephesus, just thought I'd throw that in for context. And so he, he begins this letter to this church and says, "I just want you to remember you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world."

Now some cross references where we see that this is a phrase, uh, the apostle, the word of God likes to use for those who are Christians. 1 Peter 1:1-2, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are," believers? No. You could say that but God said, "No, we're gonna look at this from My perspective." "Who are chosen." Who are chosen, in verse 2, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest." 2 Timothy 2:10. Paul writes to Timothy, we've looked at this verse already, of course, "For this reason I endure all things for those who," might believe? No, you could say that but that's not what the text says, "for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." Colossians 3:12, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." So we were chosen, picked out for God to be his children, to be saved, to be a part of his church before the foundation of the world. Brothers and sisters, what that doctrine does is it builds into your system and into your thinking and your heart a deep, deep humility and a deep, deep gratitude of God's great, great, wondrous wisdom and power and sovereignty and love toward us unworthy ones.

Now you could use the word "elect" here or "election," it's the exact same truth. Uh, the few words we found in the New Testament that are quite interchangeable, "calling or the called, chosen or the chosen ones, elect or predestined," and even a word very kin to that, "foreknowledge," all Bible words for those that God is intending to save. Luke 18:7, "now, shall not God bring about justice for His elect," his chosen ones? Of course he will. How and the point, how in the world could God choose you and he'd be sovereign therefore effectual? He cannot not complete what he started. How could he choose you before the foundation of the world and not provide the means whereby you sinful, unjust ones would ultimately, ultimately be just in his sight? Will not God bring about? You don't bring about your own justice before God. God brings about your justification before God. This is good stuff. I don't care who's preaching it.

Luke 8:33, who will bring a charge against God's elect? You know, Satan is the accuser of the brethren. We can think in our minds how we often accuse ourselves as God. "Well, I don't know that I'm saving and why do I keep floundering and, and struggling and, in sinfulness," and on and on we could go and others would accuse us, Satan accuses us. We accuse ourselves and God says, "Look at my Son bleeding on the cross. Who can bring a charge that He has not absorbed and vicariously atoned for? God picked his own.

So Christians, believers are God's elect not by chance, not by human design, but by God's sovereign, unconditional choice. That's why the Bible also speaks in Philippians that we right now have citizenship in heaven. It's so finished. God's already enrolled you in the citizenry of heaven. I don't know about you, but as a pastor, I, I grieve over the, the shallowest concept that I have a part in securing God's church. Now I know that we are the instruments God uses, and that's sobering and humbling. I get that but at the end of the day the sovereign God picks his own and builds his church, and you get to get in on it. How in the world did that happen? Unmerited favor. Unearned grace, well, if it's grace it has to be unearned.

Well, secondly in our text, he picked his own to be sons. He picked his own to be sons. Notice how he words it there. Let's look at verse 5, "He predestined us," the word predestined means to mark out beforehand, but he didn't just mark you out beforehand, he marked you out beforehand to a certain end. "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Now why did he do this? This is why, look at the last part of verse 5, "according to the kind intention of His will." You could say because God wanted to do it that way. God decided to do it that way. Shut up. Don't protest. Don't debate it. No other thought, viewpoint, understanding, insight matters. He chose to do it that way. You know what I say? I'll just get on my knees and say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord. I love the way You do things, Lord."

So he didn't just mark us out or pick us out beforehand, he marked us out, he picked us out beforehand to be sons. Stop there for a moment. Not stepchildren sort of on the outskirts of the inner circle of family. No, no, no, no, he gives you the very righteousness of his unique and one and only Son, Jesus Christ. You come before the Father in the very esteem, credibility, qualification, uprightness i.e. righteousness of his very Son, Jesus Christ. You see, when you get saved, when you become a Christian, you gain a better righteousness than Adam and Eve had before they fell in sin because you gained the righteousness of the one and only true Son of God, Jesus Christ. The new creation's greater than the old creation.

He did not choose me merely to be a captive. He could have, in a sense that's true, but not merely to be a captive. He did not choose me merely to be a bondsman. We are his slaves but not merely that. He did not choose me just to be a servant. You know, a captive is captured and ruled by an iron fist. A, a bondsman works apart from love and acceptance, a servant obtains favor on a conditional basis, but that's not who we are. We're born fully accepted in the Beloved. Sons, sons of God. So when you think about election, and you think about choosing, and you think about called, and you think about foreknown, and you think about all those glorious terms that describe the sovereignty of God in making

you his, don't stop there. He didn't just make you his, he made you his to be his precious sons. Child of God, you are the apple of his eye. You are the delight of his heart all because of the merits of the Son, Jesus Christ on your behalf.

So I'm not now just on God's side, I am not now just on God's team, I am his beloved son, whereby Romans 8:15 reminds us, "we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" And not just any son, but a son in the image of his special Son, Jesus Christ. Uh, Romans 8:29 reminds us, "For those whom He foreknew," that means he knew them before, he actually knew them before they were. You see, another thing about this greatness of God that we have to accept, but we can't wrap our little, teeny, tiny, gray matter brains around, is that God is not subject to time. God does not see things according to time. God sees the past and eternity past. God sees the present, and God sees the future and eternity future all as one thing at one time. You and I can't do that. God can. And that's the way God sees us today. He sees us as already perfected in the Beloved. He sees us already as a citizen of heaven. He sees us already as his glorified Son in eternity. He never changes and he is above time.

He made us, verse 4, look at the last part of verse 4 in our text, not only to be sons, back up in verse 4, "that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love." So God marked out, knew us before, marked us out before, chose us and called us before the foundation of the world, that we would one day be holy and blameless before him in love. What a glorious thing.

Well, not only does he pick his own and not only did he pick his own to be sons, but thirdly, he favored and blessed them with God-sized blessings. His favor toward you is not some partial thing. It's a full-fledged God-sized blessing and favor that he pours out on us. Notice what he says in verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." So much we could say there but the last phrase is what I want to look at this morning, "according to the riches of His grace." Now literally the Greek does not say, it does not say out of the riches of his grace, but according to the riches of his grace. God did not go into the vast storehouse of grace and scoop up a great handful and put it on us like one might scoop out a measure of grain from a storage bin. God did not go into the safe of his grace and select an article of grace to give us like one might open their safe and bring out a precious jewel to give to someone they loved out of their collection. God did not reach into the reservoir of his grace and dip out a gallon bucket of it and pour it on us like you might grab a bucket or withdraw a bucket from an old fashioned well. No, it's more like the lock at Wilson Dam. I fished below the lock there at Wilson Dam many times and they'll make a siren go off and that tells you they're about to displace all the water that's in the lock into the waters below the dam. And I'm telling you, when that water comes out of that lock, it is a fury of boiling, bubbling torrent and force, and everything that was in the lock is now poured into the river stream. That's what "according to the riches of his grace" means. He poured the whole load on you. He poured the whole thing on you.

We had a plant out here one summer when it was hot and dry and wouldn't rain, you ever experience a summer like that? And this plant was struggling and so our, uh, building and

lands fella put a, put a nozzle in the ground, a diffuser, a diffusion nozzle, nozzle, and he, he hooked it up to the, the water and he turned it on and he just let it flow and he walked off. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm just gonna let it get the full flow." Well, that's what God does because he opens it wide open and blesses us with God-sized blessings as his grace wrought children.

When God put his own Son on the cross to become sin and to bear the weight of our sin for us, bearing it in our place, that was the full measure of God's grace. Indeed, God himself, in the person of the Son dying on the cross for our sin. You see, it's grace when the sun rises. It's grace when the rain falls. It's a grace that means a favor we don't deserve. That's what grace is. When we enjoy the fellowship of family and friends, it's, it's grace that we are fed and it's a grace that we are clothed. It's, it's a grace that we have a means of transportation. But all of these are partial measures of grace. But when God chose some to be his sons, he gave the full measure of grace. He exemplified that so perfectly in that he sent his very Son to shed his blood on the cross and take the raging wrath of a holy God on his Son in our place. That's the measure of the wealth of God's unmerited favor toward all of those who are chosen, human side toward all those who believe.

1 Peter 1:18 and 19 reminds us, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but," he goes on, "with precious blood, even the blood of Christ." Lloyd-Jones said the richest of his grace are as large and as great and as profound as God himself, for God gave himself in his Son. And literally millions of saints of God over the centuries have, have drunk from this fountain, and it is as full as it was at the very beginning. Millions will yet drink from this flowing fountain of grace, but it will still be bubbling up to the overflowing. You can't exhaust a sovereign infinite God's grace.

That's why he says in verse 8, look at it in verse 8, "which He lavished upon us." Flow of the context, the riches of grace, verse 8, "which He lavished upon us." So God doesn't just forgive you, sinner. You sinned this week, sinned this morning, you'll sin this afternoon, for those whom he chose, who have believed, God doesn't just forgive, but his forgiveness is lavished upon us. We never need to worry that our sin will outstrip God's gracious forgiveness. We cannot sin beyond God's grace. And notice how your theology is so essential to having a foundation for these beliefs, because he is the sovereign God, he cannot kind of forgive. He can only fully forgive. He doesn't place a condition on that. He chose you to be his sons. He chose you to be holy and beloved, so therefore he lavishes on you a forgiveness that is a God-sized forgiveness. And here's what happens, I say this to you a lot, you say, "But wait a minute, somebody hurts me and offends me and wrongs me, and they're deliberate and it's habitual, and I have a hard time forgiving." Yes, and you're not God. Hallelujah. His forgiveness is greater than your forgiveness. It's more wonderful than your forgiveness. However, wicked or extensive our sin, Romans 5:20 reminds us, child of God, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." You see, God knows the depth of your wickedness. God knows the utter black defilement of your natural hearts. God knows how prone you are to selfishness and self-concerned thinking and strive to be the only Lord of your life. He knows it better than you know it and yet he

chose you to be the object that he would pour this unmerited favor on and lavish upon you blessings beyond comprehension.

But, one quick word on the human perspective. Look at verse 13. "In Him," now Paul uses the phrase "in Him or in Christ" a lot. I forgot how many times, I think it's 200 or something, 200 times the New Testament speaks of "in Him are in Christ." "In Him, you also," I think the idea there is you Gentiles versus the Jews. You also, "after listening to the message of truth," you've just heard the message of the truth, "the gospel of your salvation," here it is, "having also believed." It doesn't mean, it doesn't mean after you believed. It means believing is part of the package. "You were sealed in him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

So we say to ourselves again on this Sunday morning, this hot, summer, dry Sunday morning, how do you reconcile these two? God is absolutely sovereign, he predestined and chose and called, foreknew that we would be to this end, yet we must listen and believe. How do you reconcile the two? Well, I've never tried to reconcile old friends. It's not for me to figure that out. God help all you preachers out there that try to help God out on this. Preach his word. Preach his word. As Paul told these, this very church, the Ephesian elders before he was carted off and locked in prison, he said, "I declared to you the whole knowledge of God." Boy, he sure is, amen? He sure is. We're reading it right here. Human responsibility here is a part of God's overall sovereign plan. Maybe you could say it's like a man looking at a house. It's one house, but you can only look at it from the God side, one side and then from the man side the other side but it's the same house. The conclusion is if you've come to repent of your sins and believe on Christ, you're chosen. And if you're one of those who's chosen, you will come to repent of sins and believe on Christ.

I don't know about you, child of God, but it is a great and glorious security to this preacher to know that my Father picked me and predestined me when I didn't deserve it. He didn't just pick me and predestine me, he picked me and predestined me to be his son. And he will also bring it to pass because if we get to heaven and there's one person who made up the church who didn't get there, then God is not God, and God is not efficacious and God is not sovereign. You see, in a very real sense, the Bible teaches that the church, us and all true believers, we are the Father's precious gift to the Son in honor of his work of redemption on the cross. I'm gonna, you listen to me. I'll run through that wall if I have to. God the Father will not give an incomplete or imperfect church to God the Son. You talk about security of salvation. "Why do you Baptists preach the security of the believer?" Because God cannot give a gift to his Son that's lacking anything, and if one of us loses our salvation, the gift is not of God, it's deficient, but we know it can't be deficient because it comes from God.

Now, just in circling the field and landing here, look at, if you will at verse 3. We've been talking about these God-sized blessings. These are God-sized blessings, aren't they? Verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us," note the wording, "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." In other words, we gain everything heaven has because Jesus saves us and keeps us saved.

Spiritual blessings he talks about here, you see, those are far different, far distinct from just earthly blessings. Earthly blessings, they fade, they rust, they deteriorate, they diminish, and ultimately they just disappear. Earthly possessions fail us. Earthly relationships, they don't last. They succumb to illness. If you live long enough, you'll be a stranger down here. Everybody you know will die. Those are earthly blessings, but spiritual blessings are God-sized and of a God type, if you will. They're far superior, our spiritual blessings reserved for us in heavenly places, and that means the type of gifts that they are, holy and pure and cannot fade away. They cannot dim. They can never deteriorate. They can never diminish. But listen, listen to me: the blessings we have as God's children in Christ Jesus always and only increase. Did you hear that? Have you looked at your stock retirement account lately? I thought I was doing pretty good six months ago. Now, two years ago, I thought I was gonna starve to death. Then I thought, "Well, it's coming on pretty good." And I looked last night. It ain't so good no more. But the bank of heaven which holds spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus always and only increasing. These are God-sized blessings.

Every spiritual blessing emphasizes every, every, it's all ours. Every part of God's infinitely glorious eternal state, eternal kingdom, all of its joys, all of its pleasures, all of the happiness, it's all ours. God holds nothing back from his children. It's all ours. 1 Peter 1:4. "to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Every good and glorious thing that the Triune, Holy God, this God of all, all sovereignty, this God of omnipotence, this God of all wisdom, this God of unfathomable beauty, everything he could possibly create as a blessing to put in heaven, it's all there, and it's all ours. That's why Jesus before the cross, oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. His disciples could not even begin to fathom what he was meaning. And you and I, we can't, I'm telling you I strain every fiber of my being to grasp all that's there and I'm not even touching the hem of the garment of what Jesus meant. Just before he went to the cross, he said, "Fellas, I'm going to prepare a place for you. Wait till you see this place." What a place. What a place. What a place. This is a God-designed place.

We don't know what we've got. We don't know what we've got. I look at my grandchildren sometime in there are in-laws on that side and there are in-laws on this side, they love Jesus and they love them and they have so much and their blessed, and I've, I've told Pam they have no idea what they've got. I didn't have all that. A lot of you didn't have all that. Not even to be mentioned in comparison to what Jesus is preparing for us. Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places ours. Ours. Oh, may God take the Spirit of God and implant in your heart and mind something of an understanding far beyond this weak pastor's ability to vocalize and verbalize it to you. Don't you dare ever get over him. I don't want you to ever get over him. All God's people said. Amen.