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Chosen by the Father

Ephesians 1:4-6

Intro: It is wonderful to hear the glorious truth that Paul reveals to us in v3, that God has blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing in Christ. But as soon as we hear this, we immediately begin to wonder how these great blessings can actually be acquired by us. Paul literally calls them spiritual blessings in heavenly places. But we're not in heaven; we're on earth. How do we go about possessing the blessings God has for us?

We can think up plenty of wrong ways. Someone might assume these blessings of heaven could be possessed by force; that's what Satan tried to do. He tried to conquer heaven but he was conquered instead - that's a non-starter. One could try to earn these great blessings. But what could they hope to earn them with? Heaven's blessings must be purchased with heaven's currency. Humanity possesses no spiritual currency. Maybe we could inherit them! You know, when the Owner dies. That won't work because the Owner is the eternal God, who does not die. Maybe God is gracious and is just waiting for us to ask Him for these blessings. Even this won't work because according to Scripture, we're not the kind of people who, unaided by God, will even ask Him for blessings. On the contrary, we despise God's blessings. We only want our will and our way and if left to ourselves, we'd never ask God for anything.

Then how is it that some people receive these blessings, as Paul says in v3? The answer is found in v4-6. It's the result of God's own sovereign act, election. Paul's, "just as" in v4 (or 'because') links it to v3 and explains it. Actually, there are 3 blessings listed in 4-6: election (4), predestination (5) and acceptance (6). Of course, the 2nd and 3rd blessings are the result of the 1st: God's choosing us. What Paul is telling us here is that the blessing of salvation and all other associated blessings come to some people because God has determined from before the creation of the world to give them to them—and for that reason only.

It was my sincere desire to deal with each of these wonderful spiritual blessings in this study but it would only be possible if I did a cursory discussion of each. But we dare not diminish what Paul tells us here in v4.

He says that believers are chosen by God and they are chosen before they have done anything or have been anything for God. He also tells us that we were chosen in Christ and that we were chosen for a purpose. The great light of this doctrine casts some long shadows; namely, in trying to reconcile human responsibility with divine sovereignty. This subject has confused some and confounded many. A seminary professor once said, "Try to explain election and you may lose your mind. But try to explain it away and you may lose your soul!" But the purpose of light is not to cast shadows but to guide our steps. So, we're going to take a deep dive into this doctrine because the light of God's selection provides us with assurance to the permanence of both His plan for us and His love towards us.

Full disclosure: I may say some things that you do not agree with or have never heard. Now, if I can't back up these statements solidly from Scripture then you can write them off as simple dogma and not let them trouble your mind. But, if the Scriptures confirm the statements then you must face them honestly. The Bible was written by adults for adults and we are to treat it accordingly. I can't tell you how many times I've studied a passage and discovered that my long held understanding of that passage was not entirely correct. We must allow the Bible to speak for itself.

This doctrine of election has met with many objections over the centuries but before we deal with these objections it may be helpful to consider the various views people hold about the subject. There are 3 of them. The 1st is denial of election. This view holds that no one is saved because of some supreme hidden purpose of God. We can speak of grace, for God chose to reveal Himself to fallen humanity and provide a way of salvation through the death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that He did this proves He is gracious. But having spoken of the grace of God in this sense, we must stop there and turn the entire situation over to human beings. God graciously offers salvation, but people must choose this salvation of their own free will. Election simply does not enter into it.

The strength of this view is that it plays to what we all naturally like to think about our own abilities. The problem is, whether we like it or not, the Bible does teach it. Stott calls election a divine revelation, not a human speculation. Martyn Lloyd-Jones refers to it as a statement, not an argument. J. C. Ryle lists 11 different texts that teach election in the simplest and most undeniable language. It's hard to imagine anyone doing this and

then continuing to deny that election is the Bible's teaching but many still do.

The 2nd view holds that election is taught in Scripture but it's based on God's foreknowledge. This is more of a mediating position, held by those who acknowledge that election is taught but who can't quite come to grips with a doctrine that is considered by many to be unjust and arbitrary. They accept that God elects some to salvation and its blessings but that He does so on the basis of a choice or response of faith or some other good He foresees in them.

Of course, there is no discounting God's foreknowledge because God knows everything that has ever or can ever be known but foreknowledge as the basis for God's election is patently impossible.

First off, an election like that is not really election. In this scenario God doesn't preordain a person to anything; the individual actually ordains themselves. Another, bigger problem lingers: if what the Bible tells us about the hopeless condition of man in sin is true, what good could God possibly see in anyone to cause Him to elect that person to salvation? Goodness is from God. Faith is from God. If God is eliminated as a first cause of goodness or faith or a God-directed human choice (whatever that may be), how could there ever be any faith for God to foresee?

In other words, how could God foresee something which can't exist apart from His work in man's heart? We know all of Adam's offspring is so corrupted that they don't even possess the ability to think 1 good thought of doing well, let alone have the ability to do good. If God gave us 100K years to come around to His way of thinking it's certain that we'd never turn to Him nor do anything else but increase in sin continually to our own condemnation. The longer men live in the world, the deeper they lunge themselves into their own destruction. Thus, God cannot foresee what's not in us before He Himself puts it into us.

Many people believe they have trouble with this doctrine but their problem is not really with the doctrine of election, but with the doctrine of depravity that makes election necessary. The question to settle is: How far did the human race fall when it fell? 1) Did man fall upwards? That's what the secular evolutionists believe, that we're all getting better and better. Really! 2) Did man fall part way but not all the way; is man only damaged by sin, not ruined by it? This view affirms that we are affected by sin but insists that we

still possess the ability to turn from it and believe in Christ when the gospel is offered—by our own power. 3) Did man fall the whole way so that he's no longer capable of making even the smallest movement back toward God unless God first reaches down and performs the miracle of the new birth in him? This is the view of Scripture.

The Bible says the unsaved are “dead in trespasses and sins” ([Eph 2:1](#)). What can a dead man do to improve his situation? Let's read [Rom 3:10-12](#) - There is none who seeks after God. Jesus declared, No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him... ([John 6:44](#)). [Gen 6:5](#) gives the true picture: The LORD saw that the wickedness of men was great in the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

What good could God possibly foresee in hearts that are dead in trespasses and sins and intent on evil continually? What good could God anticipate in people who cannot come to Him and don't even seek Him unless He first draws them to Himself? If that's the situation, as the Bible says it is, then the only way any man or woman can be saved is by the sovereign election of God by which He first chooses some for salvation and then leads them to faith.

The 3rd position accepts election pure and simple. It holds that humanity is too hopelessly lost in sin ever to partake of God's great spiritual blessings on our own. Instead, God in His mercy chose us; then made His choice effectual. First He made our salvation possible by sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sin. Then He made us capable of responding to Him by sending the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the truth and glory of the gospel. Thus, all the blessings we enjoy must be traced back to this sovereign electing purpose of God toward us in Jesus. And Paul does exactly that in these opening verses of Ephesians.

If you've been in agreement with everything I've said so far, I may have lost you with the last sentence before we got to the 3rd view (the only way any man or woman can be saved is by the sovereign election of God by which He first chooses some for salvation and then leads them to faith). It's the “chooses some” that sticks in our craw or rubs us the wrong way. Objections to the Bible's teaching about election have been around a long time and there are many of them. We'll just deal with the 2 previously mentioned: that election is arbitrary and unjust.

When election is accused of being arbitrary we need to understand exactly what's being said. If the accusation is based on any supposed quality in man that is imagined to call forth election, then there is a sense in which election is arbitrary. From a human perspective there's no reason why 1 person should be elected over another. But generally, that's not the way the charge is made. Generally the objector means that election is arbitrary from God's perspective. The accusation says God has no reason for what He does. He's utterly arbitrary in picking 1 person over another. It could as easily have been the other way around. Or God could have picked no one.

That last sentence reveals the solution to this problem. For as soon as we consider of the possibility of no one being saved we run into the very purpose for election Paul talks about in [v6](#), namely, that salvation is "to the praise of the glory of His [God's] grace." That is, God purposed to glorify Himself by saving some. Since that's the case, election is **not** arbitrary. It has a purpose from God's point of view. When has God ever done anything arbitrarily? Never! So how could anyone assume that this, His greatest endeavor – an enterprise that forms the entire meaning of human history would be done on a whim? Or that we could ever hope to understand it completely?

But why one person over another? Why more than one? Why not everyone? All good questions, but none of them subtract from the doctrine of election. Its enough to know that the reasons for God's choosing are not capricious, nor are they random but they are past finding out ([Rom 11:33](#)). Paul's statement here assures us that while we may never know or understand God's ways we can be sure that His ways are altogether wise and good. The reasons for God's choosing are all in Him; in Christ, and not in us. If we're chosen in Christ, it is outside of ourselves. It's not from any deserving on our part because the name of Christ excludes all merit and everything that we have of ourselves. In short, Paul says in [v5](#) that God's choosing is according to the good pleasure of His will. Knowing that God is all good and righteous; that He is light and in Him is no darkness at all – I'm satisfied to let Him choose.

The 2nd objection is that election is unjust. It's unjust for God to choose one over another, they say. All must be given an equal chance. Really, an equal chance! Humanity has had many chances but they've wasted them all by

rejecting the gospel. It makes no difference how many “chances” are given, or to how many people. This has never been more evident than in our current society. After decades of declaring the gospel from pulpits, street corners, open-air rallies, over radio, television, satellite broadcasts and now countless worship services and sermons delivered live streaming from everywhere to anywhere, our nation is further from God than ever before. There are currently in this country, school boards advising principles not to hire Christians because of their dangerous beliefs.

Apart from God’s sovereign work no one follows Jesus. As far as justice is concerned, what would justice decree for us, if justice (and nothing but justice) should be done? Justice would decree our eternal damnation! Justice would sentence us to hell! It is not justice we want from God; its grace and more of it. But grace can’t be commanded. It must flow to us from God’s sovereign purposes decreed before the foundation of the world, or it must not come at all.

There is a classic illustration of this doctrine hidden away in the OT. In Genesis, we see Abraham as a person who was chosen by God, called out of his home country by God and directed to go to a land of promise. Abraham’s life is not without its problems but over all, he is blessed by God greatly. We can also see that this blessing is passed on to his descendents so that, what happened to Abraham, somehow happens to them. But there’s 1 relative in Abe’s story that’s enormously encouraging for us today. Lot, like all of us, is rescued from certain death in spite of himself.

In [Gen 18](#), the Lord appeared to Abraham accompanied by 2 angels. Old Abe recognizes them and invites them in for dinner. They had an important discussion but afterwards, as they were leaving, the Lord shares with Abraham why they have come. He says, “I’ve heard some bad things about Sodom and Gomorrah and we’re going down to check it out. If what I have heard is true, well...I’ll take care of it.” Well, old Abe must’ve had a clue about the morality level of those 2 cities because he immediately starts bartering with the Lord, “What if there are 50 righteous persons there? Or 45, maybe 40? What about 30? Would You do 20? Is 10 too low? The Lord agrees to spare the cities if there are 10 righteous persons found in them. Abraham should have gone lower one more time.

Let’s read [Gen 19:1](#). Now, remember, Lot chose to be in Sodom. When His

flocks became too great and were in competition for food with his uncle's, Abraham let Lot choose which way he wanted to go and he chose the well-watered plains of Jordan towards Sodom. Now we see Lot ensconced in Sodom, happy as a clam, oblivious to the carnage that's about to befall the city. He's not particularly looking to be rescued. He's an elder in the city! Even after the angels tell him destruction is coming, he lingers. He's staring death in the face and doesn't even know it.

Yet, God in His grace, saves him anyway. Lot doesn't particularly care about being saved. He's benefitting from the priestly prayers of his uncle even though he doesn't know anything about them. Of course, Abraham would know nothing about all this if the Lord hadn't shared it with him in the first place. Now God intervenes; the angels visit Lot's house, rescue him from his neighbors and urge him to flee with his family. After all this, Lot's still dragging his feet so the angels literally have to drag Lot, his wife and their 2 daughters by the hand out of the city! Why did they do that? V16 says because the Lord was merciful to him. Lot is dragged away from fiery destruction by the hand of God, not because of anything he had done, but because of God's mercy. Just as we are.

Election is not the problem many have made it to be. In fact, it's actually a great blessing in at least 4 areas.

1. Election eliminates boasting. It means salvation is utterly of God and eliminates all grounds for human boasting. Suppose it wasn't. Suppose a person could get to heaven on the basis of something they had done. In that case, that person could claim some part of the glory. In fact, it would be the critical part, the part that would distinguish them from all those who weren't saved. That's why salvation has to be ours by election alone.

2. Election gives assurance of salvation. If the ultimate grounds for salvation were in ourselves then salvation would be as unstable as we are. We might be saved one moment and lost the next. Most mornings I don't feel like a Christian but I'm still glad that my salvation is not up to me or my feelings but up to God and His working.

3. Election leads to holiness. Someone might say, "If I'm elect, I'm saved regardless of what I do; so, I'll enjoy myself and sin all I please." Those who say that are actually denying the purpose of their election (if they are). How?

Because v4 says election is to holiness. That is, election to salvation and election to holiness go together. They're never separated. So, as John Stott says, "Far from encouraging sin, the doctrine of election forbids it and lays upon us instead the necessity of holiness." If we're not growing in holiness, we're not elect. We are still in our sins.

4. Election promotes evangelism. Some think election makes evangelism unnecessary. "If God's elected them to salvation then He'll save them; why should I bother to witness?" It doesn't work that way. The fact that God elects to salvation doesn't remove the means by which He calls the elect to faith. One means is the proclamation of the gospel to sinners by those who already believe (1 Cor 1:21). The author of this letter was the 1st great missionary.

It's only by recognizing the importance of election that we gain hope in evangelism. If the hearts of the lost are as opposed to God and His ways as the Bible says they are, and if God doesn't elect people and then call them to Him effectively by the work of the Holy Spirit so that they respond in saving faith, what hope could we possibly have of winning them? If God cannot call effectively, it's certain that we cannot. But, if God is doing this work on the basis of His prior election of some, then we can speak the gospel boldly, knowing that all whom God has previously chosen to come to faith in Him will come to Him by the work of the Holy Spirit and our obedience.

We do not know who God's elect are. The only way we can find them out is by their response to the gospel and by their subsequent growth in holiness. Our task is to proclaim the Word boldly, knowing that all whom God has elected in Christ before the foundation of the world will surely come to Jesus. 😊