

Colossians ALC Winter 2018-2019

Class Eight February 3, 2019 //Put on Love // Colossians 3:12-17

Beyond all these things, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. (3:14)

I. Colossians 3:12-17 (NAS)

A. Text

¹²So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

B. Transition

(3:1-11)

1. IN view of Christ's **superiority** over all visions and wisdom (Chapter 1)
2. IN view of Christ's **sufficiency** for producing holiness in us (Chapter 2)
3. Keep your minds on things above, not on things below (3:1-2)
4. Since you died and are hidden above (for now) in Christ (3:3-4)
5. Think of yourself as dead to **immorality and idolatry** you once walked in (3:5-7)
6. Put aside **speech sins** that do not reflect your new self (3:8-9)
7. You already laid aside the old self & its practices when you were saved (3:9)
8. You already put on a new self that's being renewed into Christ's image (3:10)

II. "Since you are chosen of God, holy and beloved"

(3:12)

A. Again, he starts with identity truth before giving commands:

1. You are **chosen of God** (Greek word is the root from which we get our word 'elect')
 - a. 1:2 = Saints and faithful brethren in Christ
 - b. 1:4 = We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus
 - c. 1:6 = You understood the grace of God in truth
 - d. Ephesians 1:3-5 = He chose us before the foundation of the world and predestined us to adoption according to his purpose (see v. 5 and v. 11)
 - e. 2 Thess. 2:13 = God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation
 - f. **The idea of chosen** (Romans 9:6-24) means that God, before the foundation of the world, chose whomsoever He would, to believe the Gospel. People still have to believe. They are not forced to believe or not to believe. It just means that according to the Bible, "whoever believes on Christ will be saved" and "whoever believes on Christ was chosen by God before the foundation of the earth."
 - g. **Please understand that** not every biblically minded teacher believes the Bible teaches this. Many godly, knowledgeable teachers, even at this church, believe that "chosen" refers to the **group** of all who would one day believe. But when I read Romans 9:6-24, Romans 8:33, Ephesians 1:4 and 2:10, I see individuals chosen before the world began. What is more, it flows out of an overall record of God choosing individuals throughout the Bible (**see handout**). This is the most normal way I can explain the word, including here in Colossians. "Chosen" is supposed to result in **gratitude** and **humility** for God choosing us.

2. You are **holy**
 - a. The Greek word we translate, "**Holy**," is the same as the word we translate, "saint." It means, "Set apart," as in, "set apart for the purposes of God." We tend to think of it as, "saintly" – as in "*some really holy person.*" It is almost the reverse; it is "every normal person who has been set apart to God because of their faith in Christ." It is *not* what you *do* – it is *who you are*.
 - b. Paul is reminding us that we died, we are not our own. We have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20), and set apart **by God** and **for God's** purposes. It is parallel to the idea conveyed for all of Israel in Jeremiah 18:1-6, "*Like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*" It is taught directly in the Leviticus 11 quote found in 1 Peter 1:16, "*You shall be holy for I am holy.*"
 - c. We see this idea of holy laid out a little more in 1 Peter 2, when he says, "You are a *royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*"
 - d. This means that when you and I were saved, it was not for ourselves. It was for Him and for His purposes. So when Paul says in Colossians, you are "chosen and holy," he is emphasizing that our lives are from God and for God, set apart to whatever He intends for us to be and to do.
3. You are **beloved**
 - a. Paul reminds us before we consider our responsibilities that we are not just servants called by God, but we are loved by Him. This little word is meant to remind us before He calls us in this section to love (a carryover from 1:4), He loved us first. "In this is love, not that we loved Him but that He first loved us, and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)
 - b. If I am commanded to love, and I perceive the love as coming from me, I will usually only be able to do it while I am getting something back from it. But Christian love, agape, is something that does not originate with us. It is sourced in the God who gave it to us, first as recipients. This is why Paul reminds us that we are really loved by God before commanding us to do something.
4. Since that is true (you are chosen, set apart and loved), God has something for you, not only to **stop doing and turn away from** (verses 5-9), but He has something for you to now **start doing and turn towards**. We will see *what* in the next few verses.

B. This is exactly what he did in the first part of Colossians 3.

Before commanding us in 3:5-11 to "consider ourselves dead to certain sins" and to "lay aside certain attitudes and behaviors," he reminded us that we:

1. Were raised with Christ (3:1)
2. Had died and were hidden with Christ (3:3)
3. Will later be revealed with Christ (3:4)

III. **Since who you are is chosen, holy, beloved** (3:12-13)

A. *Put on a heart of* → (3:12)

Because of what is true about us, we can do these things which follow. We can “put on a heart” (or attitude) of these things, since that will help renew us *according to the true knowledge of the image of the One* who created us (very similar to Ephesians 4:1-5):

1. **Compassion** - Splanchna+Oiktirmou – “*tender sympathy of heartfelt compassion*” - to hurt for or with people, to feel for them. The first word is the word from which we get “spleen” and suggests something coming from your innermost parts.
2. **Kindness** - Deep goodness... includes grace... directed at meeting another’s need.
3. **Humility** - Not thinking highly of yourself. Lowliness. Deference. Rom 12:3. Phil 2:3.
4. **Gentleness** - Tame, gentle, as in speaking of a horse.
5. **Patience** - Makro+thumia (long wrath) – bearing up steadily for a long time with people, or “Steady response in the face of provocation.”

- B. To summarize those, he is telling us to put on a heart of deep care for people, exercising kindness and care towards them, while not thinking highly of “self,” and being gentle in responses to them rather than reacting to them in anger. This includes the idea that when they are difficult and frustrating, we can suffer long with that inconvenience.

MOST IMPORTANT THING WE WILL SAY TODAY:

*Keep in mind that he is not starting out the book or even the chapter or even the section with the command to do these things. He knows from the Holy Spirit that the ability to do these is dependent on the reality that we have died, we have been seated with Christ, we are dead to sin, and we already laid aside an old self and put on a new self when we believed. On top of that, we are loved, we are set apart and we are chosen. From that wellspring of “identity” truths, it is **now** possible to do these things.*

C. Carry out these actions (3:13)

1. **Bearing with one another** Literally means, “to hold up,” and in this context, means to hold on without stopping when up against something that makes you want to give up. Similar to Philippians 4:4 – Let your forbearing spirit be made known to all. This implies that love and patience and humility are more important to you than avoiding being frustrated and inconvenienced.
2. **Forgiving one another** Just that, forgiving whoever we have a complaint against, in the same way Christ did us. He had a complaint against us (“the certificate of debt that was against us,” 2:14), but He forgave it. This means we are not continuing to hold onto offenses, but rather in an ongoing way, practicing forgiveness.

- D. **Summarize** Colossians 3:1-13: *Since you are with Christ, set your minds on things from His perspective, not on things from an earthly perspective. Since you have died and are hidden with Christ in the presence of God the Father, consider yourself dead to previous patterns of immorality and idolatrous pursuit of things like you did before Christ. Put off all the ways we can sin with our mouth since you have already laid aside your old self.*

When you believed, you put on the new self who is being conformed to the image of Christ since God chose you, since you were set apart, and since you are completely loved. You are now to care for people from deep in your heart, look for opportunities to bless them with the mercy of God, don't think too highly of yourself and your position, and bear up patiently when people are difficult and frustrating. Patiently endure with difficult people and forgive them, remembering how Christ forgave you of so much.

IV. Beyond All These Things

(3:14-17)

- A. Paul prepares to give four more commands (3:14)
- B. *Put on love* – here Paul borrows the verb (“put on”) from verse 12 since there is no verb here. After telling them to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, he tells them to put on “love” (agape). This is the glue that ties it altogether. Love (*other-centered sacrificial regard*) is “the perfect bond of unity.”
- C. *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts* (3:15)
 - 1. *The peace of Christ* is to “arbitrate” or “settle, as in a debate.” This means that Christ’s peace is always available, and should direct each decision we make. When we think another person or circumstance has robbed us of the peace of Christ, we have not understood the peace Christ offers us. Jesus answering Pontius Pilate was a great example. He is quiet with all Pilate’s questions, and nonplussed. But when Pilate “threatens Him” (“*Do you not know I have the power of life or death over you??!!*”), Jesus speaks, not out of fear or selfish ambition, but to proclaim the sovereignty of His Father (“*you would have no power over Me but that My Father had given it to you.*”)

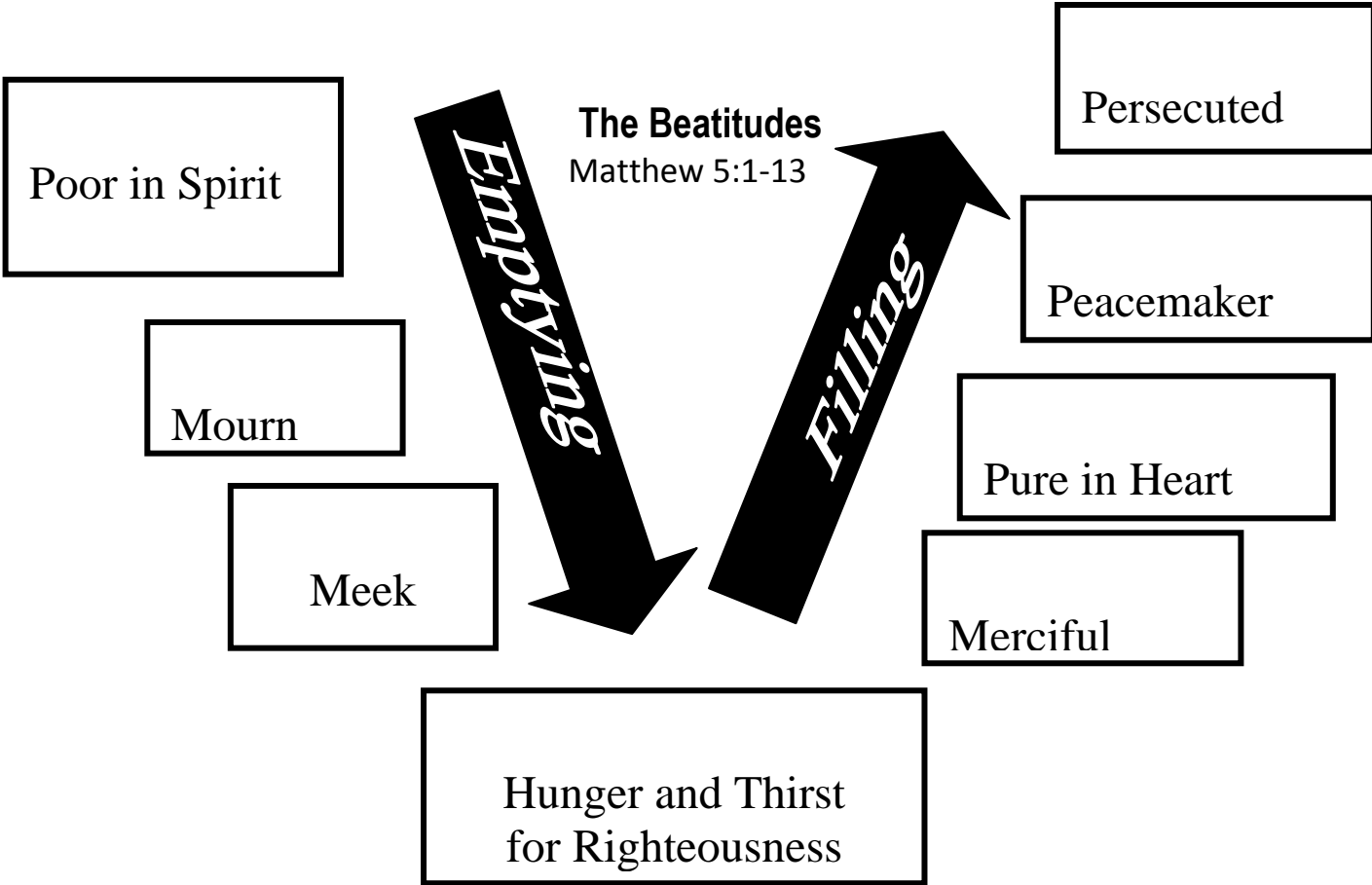
I often use Romans 8:6 as an “arbiter.” *The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.* If what I am thinking about causes me distress, fear, anger, or other “death” kinds of emotions, I do not trust myself. I assume that if I am in a “death” experience over what I am evaluating or experiencing, I am not operating in the Spirit. *“The mind set on the Spirit is peace.”*
 - 2. *... to which indeed you were called in one body* (see Ephesians 4:1-6)

Here I am reminded that Paul is not just talking with us about a “personal peace,” but a peace which is supposed to operate when we are within the body of Christ. The peace to which we are called which is to arbitrate for us how we handle discussions (rather than fear or anger) is especially meant to be seen in how we conduct ourselves in the Body of Christ. If I can’t talk with someone in the Body because I am so angry or so fearful, I have not laid hold of the peace of Christ that I have already been given (2 Peter 1:2).
 - 3. *... and be thankful.* This reminds me that when I am operating like I am in the presence of Christ and when I am operating like I have died to my own demands, and that I have laid aside the old self and put on the new self, thankfulness should pervade everything I do. It is a natural consequence to the peace of Christ.

- D. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you (3:16)
1. The word of Christ – another term for the word of God (Romans 10:17)
 2. Let it dwell/abide – like what Jesus said in John 15:7 – *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask what you will and it shall be done for you.*
 3. Here the command is another in the series of what we put on if we are to walk in accordance with the calling. We put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love and the peace of Christ. But we must put on – allow to dwell “richly” in us the Word of Christ. That means many things, and it might look different for different people. But it involves listening, reading, meditating and memorizing.
- E. *With all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another by psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*
1. Teaching and admonishing each other – this is “authentic fellowship.” It is the idea of helping one another grow in Christ in the context of friendship in the Body through speaking truth and exhorting and encouraging each other.
 2. Singing to God with thankfulness in your hearts – this is “real worship.” The music is ultimately to Him and the attitude is a portion of our praise.
- F. Do all you do in the name of the Lord Jesus, being thankful. (1:3, 1:12, 3:15; 3:16; 3:17)
This is a capstone verse: It ties all we have looked at in this chapter together. Whatever I do, however I do it, I am doing it “as unto the Lord.” I live before an audience of one.

V. Discussion and Homework

- A. Discussion – Either for class or for during the next week with someone you know
1. Do you think of yourself as someone God has *chosen, set apart and loved* deeply? If you believe that you were chosen, set apart in a unique way for His purpose, and loved deeply, how does it free you to follow His calling?
 2. You and I are to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness or patience? What would it require of you if you were to do one of those better than you now are?
 3. Share an example or two of where the word dwelling richly in you has changed you.
 4. Do you practice thankfulness in all things? If so, how did you start doing that? If not, what holds you back?
- B. Homework
1. Memorize either Colossians 3:14 or 3:15. My original plan was verse 15, but as I have been studying the chapter, verse 14 stands out to me more. Share it with a seatmate next week at the beginning of class.
 2. List the five attitudes we are to put on from verse 12. Of those, which is He particularly calling you on?
 3. Discuss with someone you are close to how you feel or what you think about this idea that emerges from Colossians 3. *Because I died with Christ and am seated with Him, it is possible for me to manifest a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, long suffering, forgiveness, love, thankfulness, peace.* When I do not exhibit these, it is not the other person or circumstance.



Individual Election

John Morrison

Introduction

Here I'd like to present a biblical argument for "individual" election, by which I mean "God's selection of certain individuals to believe unto salvation before the foundation of the earth" who would then make up "God's people." We also can refer to this as *predestination*, the idea that our eternal destination was decided before the world began.

Individual election is distinguished from two other popular perspectives: that of "**man's free choice**" and that of "**corporate election**." I see *individual election* as an expressed biblical doctrine that is an offshoot of His sovereign rule. It does not mean that people are puppets; they still need to believe. But it does mean God selected them before creation.

Those who espouse the view of "man's free choice" believe that passages that can be construed as teaching or implying God selecting people before the world was created refer to God *merely knowing* who would believe – *foreknowledge*. They say God knew before the world began who would believe, but by no means chose them to do so.

Those who espouse "corporate election" believe that a *whole body of believers* was chosen by God before the foundation of the earth, *but not the individual members of that group*. Whoever believes becomes part of the "chosen people." In this view, while it is believed that a *group was indeed chosen*, the individuals who populate that group *were not* identified out or pre-selected by God. It is a way of saying "He chose them" without having to believe that He chose specifically for some and, by implication, against others.

Biblical Record

Let's begin by looking at a variety of passages which speak of a widespread pattern of God's selection. Some will deal directly with His election to believe, and some will deal with other ways He chose individuals. Together, they demonstrate the idea that His specific and individual choice before the foundation of the earth is part of a pattern.

Genesis 12:1-3 God selects Abram and promises to make him a great nation before Abram believes. Abram was an idolater from a family of idolaters from Ur and from Canaan, but God

chose him as the progenitor of all His people. Not until Genesis 15:6 does Abram believe on the Lord unto righteousness (see also Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6).

Genesis 15:13 God appoints Israel to go to Egypt and stay in servitude 400 years (cf. Exodus 12:40 and Gal. 3:17). Not merely a prophecy of what will happen but a selected appointment for them. (More on this when we get to Exodus 3).

Genesis 16:11-12 God informs Hagar that her son (Ishmael) will be against everyone and everyone will be against him and that he will live east of his brothers. Ishmael is not yet born and God has already decreed a future for him which is still on display today. As often happens in the litany of prophecies/decrees, some argue this it isn't a decree; it is only foretelling the future. Stay tuned as we continually face that question.

Genesis 17:15-22 God decrees to Abraham that yet-unconceived and already named Isaac is the chosen one with whom God will covenant and that 13 year old Ishmael will become a great nation (though not negating the earlier decree of being in opposition to everyone and everyone being in opposition to him). This is harder for people to say is not a decree. God has spoken a name and a covenant for only one person.

Genesis 24:1-27, 44 God selects Rebekah for Isaac. Abraham directs a servant who trusts and asks God to show him the one *He had chosen* for Isaac.

Genesis 25:19-34 God decrees that the twin children inside Rebekah will become *two nations and that the older will serve the younger. They had done nothing, good or bad, but God decreed this.* Some may say, "It was no decree. It was merely a prophecy according to his foreknowledge of what would happen." However, that is not how the inspired apostle puts it in Romans 9:10-13. He describes it as God's "*purpose according to choice*" (we will look at that in more detail in a few minutes).

Genesis 28:1-22 God tells Jacob that He will give the land to him and to his descendants as He had already promised, and Jacob is not even yet a believer (cf., v. 21). In the course of it, He repeats a promise He made in Genesis 15:17-21 about the land. This was all because He willed it, just as He willed to make a nation. (Repeated 35:9-12)

Genesis 37:5-11 God gave dreams to Joseph about his family bowing to him. These were not merely prophecies of what would happen, but God's choice for him (cf., 50:20).

Genesis 49 God decrees the futures of the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob). Again, some will say God merely has foreknowledge but as we follow His call, I think we will be able to see that God's selections are more than knowledge; they are appointments.

Genesis 49:10 God appoints that Messiah ("scepter/ruler's staff" = symbolic of the power and authority of Messiah the Prince) shall come from Judah's line. That means that whoever Messiah is, He will be born from the lineage of Judah – and later, the lineage of David. No one

– even in the “corporate election” community – thinks that God merely foretold whose line the Messiah comes from. Everyone who believes in the scriptures sees Judah’s line as *an appointed selection on God’s part*, without thought to which son of Jacob deserved this distinction. No one did. It was a grace.

Genesis 50:20 Joseph sees that *God was the sovereign who appointed his trials*. This reminds us that the calls of God on Joseph in 37:5-11 were *God’s choice for him*, and not merely God’s foreknowledge of what would happen.

Exodus 3 God selects Moses to lead His people out from Egypt. His selection is not because Moses is brave (4:1) or a confident leader or speaker (4:10) or even full of faith and obedience (4:13, 6:30). He surely is not but God selects him.

Exodus 3:10-22 God tells Moses that he will lead Israel out from Egypt with great plunder and that Egypt’s king (Pharaoh) will not permit it at first, so that God has the opportunity to display His great powers for both unbeliever and believer to see who God is. (4:5, 6:7, 7:5; 7:18; 8:10) This includes both prophecy and His plan and purpose.

Exodus Chap. 3-10 God “hardens Pharaoh’s heart” (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 27; 11:10) This is not merely a description of something that is happening or a mere prophecy of the event (though it is both). It is rather *God’s chosen action through Pharaoh*. (See also Romans 9:17-18, which we look at in more detail in a few minutes).

Psalms 139:16 God ordains the length of days for each of us before we are born. Notice that this is how many days are *ordained* – not how many are *foreseen*.

Jeremiah 1:1-10 God set apart Jeremiah from the womb – for His purpose – not because of anything about Jeremiah, but because it pleased Him. (See especially vv. 5-7)

Jeremiah 18:1-10 In an example which also can support the “covenant” position of election, Jeremiah is told to go to the potter’s house where God then conveys that in His mind, He is the potter and Israel is the clay. In this example, God shows His authority and reminds them that He has made them and can break them as He sees fit.

Ezekiel 2 God sets apart Ezekiel, merely another illustration of the idea that God has purposes for us which He shows us as we respond to His call.

Ezekiel 16:1-34 In a riveting passage, God shows Israel that He selected them for his own purpose and they did not choose Him.

Daniel 4:24-37 Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that God placed him on the throne and God would remove him because he failed to recognize God as the One behind all rule and authority – including his. So God selects Nebbie to be king and to be brought low.

Hosea 1:1-10 God appoints Hosea to marry a woman of harlotry and to have three children of specific names to teach Israel specific lessons.

Matthew 1:1-17 The genealogy of Jesus through Joseph displays God directing the events leading to Jesus being born of David's line on His father's side.

Matthew 2 God has even appointed where the Messiah would be born and who would be killed in his place long before he is even born (see v. 17-18).

Mark 13:20 *But for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He cut short the days...*
Here Jesus tells his audience that when the tribulation comes, it will be so bad that His Father will cut the days of suffering short because of *the "elect" whom He chose*.

Luke 1:5-25 God has decreed who John the Baptist would be, who his parents would be, what he would be like and the circumstances related to his conception and birth

Luke 19:28-38 Jesus repeats the Zech. 9:9 prophecy regarding His use of a colt to enter Jerusalem. Here we see even the animal/s are appointed 100's of years before.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you. Likely refers to their being chosen as apostles (cf., 6:70), but theologically fits with election to belief as well.

Acts 1:15-20 Apostles recognize Judas was appointed to betray Jesus (See also Matt. 27:3-10 and its forbear, Zechariah 11:12-13). He was appointed, selected from before the world to betray Jesus, and yet did it of his own volition.

Acts 1:21-26 Disciples know that *God has selected* an apostle to replace Judas and appeal to God to direct them, and Matthias is chosen.

Acts 2:23; 4:27-28 God predetermined to turn Jesus over to the Jews for His death.

Acts 9 In one of the clearest examples of God choosing a man, God knocks Saul off his horse, blinds him and speaks to him, telling him "it will be told you what you must do." At that time, Saul's only reason to believe is because he was forcibly knocked off his horse and had the Lord appear and speak to him – "I am Jesus."

Acts 10 In another clear example of God choosing a man, God sends an angel in a dream to Cornelius, a Gentile God-fearer, and God sends a specific dream to Peter to go and eat and share with Cornelius the gospel of Christ.

Acts 13:48 In Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas testify of Jesus and among Gentiles, "*as many as had been appointed to eternal life*" believed.

Acts 16:9-10 God gives a vision to Paul to go to Macedonia and tells him not to go to Asia. This is God's calling for some in Greece to receive the gospel.

Acts 17:24-27 Paul says that God not only created people but determined the times and places of their habitation. Combined with Psalm 139:16, we see that God has designed who we are, where we live, who our parents are, and how long we'll live.

Acts 23:11 God tells Paul he must testify in Rome... part of God's plan for Paul, which goes all the way back to God's original call on him in Acts 9:15-16.

Romans 1:1, 6, 7 Paul refers to himself as called to apostleship and to them as called as saints, which he explains more in later chapters. Here – not lexically but in biblical usage “called” is not the idea of ‘identified’ or ‘invited’; it is the idea of appointed. It is what some call an “efficacious” call – that is, one which accomplishes its purpose.

Rom. 1:16/Jn. 3:16 A quick halftime break to remember, as we study the individual election of God, that the gospel is for everyone who believes. *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*

Rom. 3:9-18 (esp. 11) *No one seeks after God.* This argues in favor of His seeking us.

Romans 8:28-30 God causes all things to work together for good for a certain group of people: those who love God (John 14:23) and are called according to His purpose. He then defines the purpose to which we are called: *to be conformed to the image of His Son.* But He does more. He explains that *whom He foreknew, He predestined; and whom He predestined, He called; whom He called, He justified; whom He justified, He glorified.* In this passage, God makes it plain that when He “calls,” it means He saved them.

Romans 8:33 No one can bring a charge against someone elected by God (reminiscent of Zechariah 3:1-5 where Satan unsuccessfully brings charges against the high priest Joshua, who is not distinguished by his goodness. Rather, he is in filthy clothes and referred to by the “angel of the Lord” (believed by many to be the pre-incarnate Christ) as is a “brand plucked from the fire.” But at the throne of God, the angel removes his filth and “clothes him in righteousness,” defending him against accusations.

Romans 9 In this chapter and the two following, Paul addresses what he thinks are some fairly reasonable questions and issues that people may have.

If chapters 1-8 portray how a person can know God, become forgiven, become a child of God and walk victoriously with God, then whatever became of the original plan of God – the plan for the Jewish people to be His people and His glory? Doesn't their unbelief call into question the power of God to do what has been claimed – that of changing us into someone who is always a victor, someone who becomes like Christ?

His answer begins by testifying of his own love and burden for the Jews, the people God has not called him to. He does so with the strongest language possible: He says he longs so much for their salvation that he is virtually ready to give up his own salvation if it could help. No stronger language. No stronger love.

We will see that in the cases presented that Paul is addressing the issue of salvation as part of a larger context: God always chooses. We are ultimately under His choice, believer or unbeliever, Jew or Gentile. And God's word does not fail merely because some (most) of Israel is as yet unsaved (9:6).

Romans 9:11-14 Jacob and Esau were not yet born and had done nothing good or bad. God called forth a plan according to His purpose and choice for the older to serve the younger. It was not because of what they did but because of His call. Then Paul quotes Malachi 1:2-3 where God said, “*Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.*”

Paul’s use of this reference is in the context of calling and purposing them before being born. The issue in Genesis is not “salvation” per se – but rather God’s purpose for their life. But Paul uses it here – the idea of choosing one but not the other – as an example of election of one and not the other as part of a pattern with God.

We know this because in v. 14, Paul anticipates what a person who is reading will feel and think. How can God choose one and not another? That seems so unfair – even if I am one of the ones chosen! He takes on that expected challenge to verses 11-13: *What shall we say then? There is not injustice with God, is there? May it never be!*

Romans 9:15-18 Here the apostle continues this line of thought regarding those who are not chosen by God. He quotes Exodus 33:19, saying “*I will have mercy on whom [singular] I will have mercy and compassion on whom I will have compassion.*” He not only quotes that verse, but intensifies the illustration three times.

First, he summarizes: it does not depend on the man’s will or the man’s efforts but on the God who has mercy (v. 16), reminiscent of John 1:13. Second, he illustrates with the life of Pharaoh. He reminds us that God told Pharaoh that He had raised him up specifically so that He could display His power against him so that His name would be proclaimed. Multiple times God said He “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” so that He could display His power so that Egypt would know that He was God (v. 17). Third, he re-summarizes: He has mercy on whom He desires and hardens whom He hardens. (v. 18) It helps to note that His mercy is not put on a group (plural) but on an *individual* (singular).

Romans 9:19-24 If there were any doubt as to whether Paul argued that God chooses some to be recipients of mercy and some to not receive mercy, it should be forever laid aside after these verses.

In verse 19, Paul anticipates the questioner will feel like it is wrong and unfair for God to choose someone before they are good or bad - before they are born - to receive His mercy and compassion and favor which are ultimately granted in salvation and to choose someone else to not receive his mercy – ultimately meaning condemnation. And remember, he anticipates his reader will be a believer!

You will say, “Why then does He still find fault? Who can resist His will?” The questioner is saying, “How can God judge someone for not believing if He didn’t choose them?” Before we get to the answer, it is at least important to realize that Paul knows that is what he is teaching and it *feels* wrong.

His verses 20-21 response is vintage Paul.

On the contrary, who are you O man, to answer back to God? Paul doesn’t defend God’s practices and policies and choices – he merely presents them as God tells him to. As a perfect illustration reminding those with any Jewish or Old Testament background (those most are Gentiles) of Jeremiah 18, Paul adds, “The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?”

Here Paul reminds people who God is (sovereign creator and gracious redeemer) and who they are (objects of mercy, brands plucked from the fire). He has borrowed the Jeremiah example that was for the nation and applied it to individuals. We know he is speaking of individuals who are not chosen because of the context from verses 1-18:

I love the Jews enough to give up my salvation. But God's salvation comes as He says, not as we wish. It comes not by "physical lineage claims" but by being children of God's promise. For example, it came through Isaac – not Ishmael – though Ishmael was older. It came through Jacob, not Esau – though Esau was older. It came through a man who was too old to sire children – Abraham. It came in the face of ultimate world authority – Pharaoh – whom God chose to harden and reject. And it was all His predetermined choice – not theirs.

Then, rather than thinking he needs to soft pedal his argument or let it rest after so many illustrations and pointed questions, Paul goes further.

In verses 22-23, Paul says *What if God, although willing to show his power and wrath (as He did with Egypt), endured with patience "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction"?* What if God decided to create and "endure" for a time people He has already destined for destruction? And what if at the same time he prepared them for destruction, He also "prepared beforehand vessels of mercy" who would receive mercy so that they would more fully recognize the riches of His glory?

Paul's main point in Romans 9:6-24 is this: God chose whomever He wished to choose for mercy and compassion and He chose others to receive wrath and destruction. And God can't be called into question over that because He is God and we are only vessels who have received His mercy.

If anything, since we have received mercy, instead of accusing Him of unfairness to those who haven't been chosen, we should be so overwhelmed by His mercy being directed to us from before we were even born, before we had done anything good or bad.

And if it affects us like it affects Paul, it motivates us to share with everyone we can and to love them so much and to be so burdened for them that we are almost willing to give up our salvation to help them understand and believe.

Romans 10:5-13 This is like our earlier "halftime" where we are reminded in the middle of all this teaching about God's choice, that the gospel's offer is still, "*Whoever believes will be saved.*" Paul reminds his readers that "with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness" and "whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed" and "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (vv. 10-13).

Romans 11:1-13 Paul asks a question once again about the Jews, starting the chapter with them in view just as he did in 9:1 and 10:1. But here he asks a question which is very interesting, and one that leads to some very significant revelation that we get nowhere else about God's plan.

First (verses 1-5), Paul asks whether God's people Israel have been rejected. He answers by saying, "Of course not. I am an Israelite." He answers regarding corporate Israel by comments about himself as an individual. He says that it is as it was in the days of Elijah – there are a remnant of Jews God has kept for Himself who believe in the Lord.

(An interesting side note to the element of this discussion on individual election as it relates to corporate election: Were the 7000 whom God “set aside for Himself” in the day of Elijah a “group he elected” or “individuals he elected”? That is, did He select 7000 specific men to not bend the knee or did He have a number in his mind (7000) He had selected, and whichever were the first 7000 to fill it got to be in the group?)

Second (verses 7-10), Paul says that what is happening right now is that God is “giving a spirit of stupor” to Israel so that they will not yet believe. That is remarkable! We know that He delights in people being saved and never in destruction of people (**Please see Ezekiel 33:11, Luke 15:7 &10, 1 Tim. 2:3, 2 Peter 3:9**). But here He explains that their rejection is an opportunity for Gentiles to come to faith (vv. 11-13).

Romans 11:25-36 Here Paul relays God’s plan to eventually lift the partial hardening of Israel so that all Israel will believe and be saved (v. 26). He shows the Gentiles how their commitment to the gospel means that they are enemies to Israel’s opposition to the gospel, but that they should extend great mercy to Israel since their unbelief has been ultimately to their benefit. God extends mercy to us now so that He can extend mercy to them later after they are adequately provoked to jealousy (11, 30-32).

This section (which terminates in a powerful doxology in vv. 33-36) contributes to this discussion the fact that believing Jews now are part of a people “God has kept for Himself,” that God has intentionally dulled Israel to the Gospel through a “stupor” so that more Gentiles will come in and thus provoke all Israel to believe.

That is, God chose some Jews to believe in spite of the general unbelief among the nation, chose most of Israel to be under a stupor, chose some Gentiles who will come to faith during the “filling of the Gentiles” (v. 25) and has chosen all of Israel to come to faith when the time comes.

1 Cor. 1:1-10 Here we are called as saints into fellowship with His Son (v. 2, 9)

1 Cor. 1:26-31 He tells us to consider our calling by God. He called us in spite of the fact that we were not wise or powerful or noble. Rather, He called us who have no merit on which to stand so that we won’t boast in ourselves but only in Him. This is a quiet way the Lord reminds us that if we are in Christ, it is His doing (v. 30).

1 Cor. 2:10-16 Here we are taught that it is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that God’s message of the gospel (vv. 2:1-9) is understood by man. God’s thoughts are only known by God and by those to whom the Holy Spirit reveals them.

Galatians 1:15 The apostle Paul understands that he was set apart from his mother’s womb and *efficaciously* ‘called’ through God’s grace to have Christ revealed. Being set apart from a mother’s womb seems part of a pattern in God’s economy. It fits in with Him knowing us while we are being formed, determining the places of our habitation, ordaining the number of our days before we are born, etc.

Some say that is only for those for whom the Bible directly claims it (like Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Rachel and John the Baptist and Paul), and in those cases it is required because they have been set apart to a certain job. When taken against the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, I think that is a thin argument.

Ephesians 1:4-5 In verse 3, we read several ways “God has blessed us” to which Paul adds this in verse 4: “*Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.*” In verse 5 Paul adds, “*In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.*”

While some believe that the plural use of pronouns (us, we) and nouns (sons) means that the “choosing” was of a group, but not as individuals, that seems forced. It seems far more natural to say that each of those who are reading this as “saints” understands that what he is saying applies to each of them individually as well as to them collectively.

Maybe an analogy helps. If a coach spoke to an all-star team or a conductor spoke to an orchestra to which one must be invited, and said, “You have been chosen,” it would be an unnatural thing for individuals to think that they were referring to the group but not to them as an individual. It is both. To be otherwise would mean God chose from before the foundation of the earth unnamed, unidentified and undifferentiated individuals to fill a specific group, but that He let them choose whether they would be in that group. Why bother even claiming to have chosen this group if you really were waiting for them to choose to be part of it? (Also be sure to consider Ephesians 2:10 in light of this).

Ephesians 1:11-14 This idea continues as we see that we have been predestined according to His purpose to obtain an inheritance and to result in the praise of His glory.

For Paul, the idea of being chosen, elected, selected before the earth in ways that others were not does not offend his sensibilities with respect to believing. He says in verse 13, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit *after having believed the gospel*. In other words, God’s predetermination did not obviate or rule out our need to believe.

Ephesians 2:1 Those dead in trespasses and sins: can they believe unaided?

Ephesians 2:10 Paul lets grace-bought, believers by faith people know that whatever the things are God wants us to do, He has already prepared beforehand for us to be able to do. He uses the same language as in 1:4. We see choosing for salvation and for ministry.

Whatever it is that God has prepared beforehand is certainly different with me than with the next person. To think of verse 10 as addressing a group as a group and not a group of individuals seems unlikely.

Ephesians 4:1-16 This classic passage is one of the best places for seeing that God addresses us both as individuals and as a group. While the context for the chapter is not election to believe as it is elsewhere, it is a good place to see how God purposes our instructions to affect us both as individuals and as a corporate body.

1 Thess. 1:4 We read, “knowing His choice of you” and are met again with this idea that we have seen throughout the Bible.

1 Thess. 5:9 His expression “God has not destined us for wrath,” is in part because as we saw in Romans 9 that He has destined others for wrath. “Destined” refers to a previously concocted plan and purpose with the ability to carry it out.

2 Thess. 2:13 The language is hard to miss and hard to misconstrue: *But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.* To remove a sense of individual choice for us would be like saying He doesn’t love us individually but only collectively; that doesn’t seem like the normal way to interpret a message.

2 Timothy 1:9 Paul continues this message of our having been set apart from before the earth’s foundation with “{God} who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” The focus is clearly on eternal salvation.

2 Tim 2:10 *For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.*

Titus 1:1 *Paul, a bond-servant... for the faith of those chosen of God*

1 Peter 1:2 *...{who are chosen} according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.* By itself, this could be used by any of the three approaches we have mentioned.

1 Peter 2:9-10 The best corporate election passage in the Bible. I don’t mean that it *teaches corporate election* and does not teach individual election. It is just a passage which sees us as a whole group which has been set apart by God.

Rev. 13:8, 17:8 *... whose names were not found written in the book of life written before the foundation of the world.* Argues against the corporate idea of election and makes the idea of “man’s choice” position as suspect. It makes the most sense that if there is a book written before this world was made that has in it names which God wrote that He had selected them, especially in view of some of the passages we have read.

Conclusions

1. God is everywhere presented in the Bible as sovereign. He exists outside creation and created it and everything in it for His own pleasure.
2. God tells us throughout the Bible that He selects people for His purpose. He did it not only with a nation but with individuals.
3. When we read more in the New Testament about the plan of God to save some we learn that it was His plan before the world was created. It's not plan "B" in response to man's sin.
4. God declares that no one seeks Him and that we are dead in our sins.
5. God declares that He has selected some for salvation and He has appointed others for destruction. Yet because salvation comes through faith, He forces no one to believe. (Story of the man who said that if his flower garden in his backyard were on fire and were not being consumed and a voice called from the fire, he would not bother to turn to look at it because it can't happen.)
6. God declares that apart from the disclosure by His Holy Spirit, we could not understand his mind, His truth or His gospel plan.
7. God declares that whoever believes (John 3:16), i.e., whoever turns to the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16), will be saved.
8. We never would have known about "election" if we had not been saved. It is a doctrine revealed to believers after the fact, so that they can look back and realize how God directed the events and opportunities which led to their hearing and believing.
9. The primary obstacle for people with respect to individual election is the issue that if God selected some, then He passed over others. Not only did He pass over others, but we read in Romans 9 that "He prepared vessels for destruction" so that the recipients of His mercy would be even more prone to praise the glory of His grace.
10. In some ways, the issue of individual election is mostly an offense to western man with his emphasis on freedom and choice. God is the author of that freedom and does not oppose it. He merely tells us that He will deal with us according to the ways we exercised that freedom – first with respect to believing the gospel, and second with respect to submitting ourselves to Him as Lord. CS Lewis said, "Hell is God's greatest compliment to man."
11. The issue of corporate election comes about not because of explicit teaching in the Bible (e.g., clear teaching about appointment to corporate salvation and clear teaching against individual election). It comes about because people are trying to avoid the perceived offense of a God who appoints some to salvation and some to damnation before time began. But in doing so, it fails the biblical test – it interprets passages like Ephesians 4 and Romans 9 less accurately – and it fails the logical test (how do you select a group before the world begins and not select those who will be in that group?)
12. The doctrine of "man's choice" and election being a word to describe God's foreknowledge wherein He sees who will believe and then appoints them, making man the author of his own salvation, does not pass the test of the biblical record. It flies in the face of 6000 years of recorded history of the dealings of God with man where He does "whatsoever He will" and yet allows man to make choices.