

Who Chose Whom?
Ephesians 1:3-14
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Last week as we looked at Ephesians 1:3-14, we focused on the great spiritual blessings Christians enjoy. We are adopted as God's children, our sins are forgiven, we become trophies of God's grace, and we have the Holy Spirit. We did not however, take time to explore what Paul sees as one more very important spiritual blessing: God has chosen us and predestined us to be His children. Now, when many Christians hear the word "predestined" the first thought that comes to their mind is not "spiritual blessings." Rather, the thought is often, "That is a controversial and complicated doctrine." Some of you may even be thinking, "Pastor Dan, we are never going to figure it out, so why waste our time talking about it?" Well, I must admit I approach this topic with a bit of anxiety. My goal is not to cause confusion and certainly not cause division. However, my job as a pastor is to help you understand what the bible says and what it means for our lives. That is what the Lord has called me to do. And when we study Ephesians Chapter 1, it is really hard to ignore the topic of predestination because it pretty much hits us right in the face.

I would also add, that it is probably not a good idea to avoid particular bible teachings because they are complicated or controversial. **Deuteronomy 29:29** tells us that **The secret things belong to the Lord God, but that things that are revealed belong to us, and to our children.** Some of the questions people have about this topic are ones to which only God knows the answer. However, in this passage, and others, the Lord has revealed truth about predestination that I think He wants to use to strengthen our souls. It may take some effort on our part, but hard thinking on hard topics of scripture, when guided by the Holy Spirit could produce rich rewards. Now, I suspect not all of the questions you have on this topic will be answered today. It is very possible you may leave this room with more questions than you had when you came in. My hope, however, is that the Lord will help each of us better understand His truth on this difficult, but important topic. Let's pause and pray the Lord would speak to us through His word today.

Okay, let's start by looking at what the Lord says to us through the apostle Paul. Remember, these

are God's words and we need to take them very seriously. Again, our text is Ephesians 1:3-14.

First, Paul tell us that we, as Christians, have been predestined. We have been chosen by God. I sometimes talk to Christians who say, "Pastor Dan, I don't believe in predestination." My response is, "Well, that is your right. This is America. You can choose to believe, or not believe, whatever you want. But if you don't believe in predestination you cannot claim you believe what the bible teaches. There is no question. Scripture clearly teaches Christians have been predestined and chosen by God." Friends, if you are skeptical about that claim, I could point you to numerous passages in the bible, but one place it is clear is in this chapter. **Ephesians 1:4a, 5 Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.**

Friends, if you believe the bible is God's word, then you must agree that, as Christians, we have been chosen and predestined. Now, we may not all agree what that means, I am not sure exactly what it means, but you ought to acknowledge it is a fact. The bible teaches Christians have been chosen and predestined by God.

Second, Paul tells us that "chosen and predestined" is a good thing. In Ephesians he is praising God for choosing and predestining us. He says that it is out of love that God has predestined us to be adopted as His children. Paul sees this as a beautiful truth to celebrate. I think Paul would be quite puzzled by Christians who shy away from exploring his teaching on predestination because of a fear that is too complicated or that it is somehow an "ugly truth." The fact God has chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world and has predestined us to be adopted as His children is something which makes Paul shout, "Halleluiah!" If we don't share that response, I think it is probably because we do not understand predestination in the same way the apostle Paul

does. Friends, if you are a Christian who desires to believe and obey God's word, you probably should pay closer attention to these verses and seek to understand why Paul says what he does.

That brings us to a more difficult question: What does Paul mean? What does he mean when he says we have been chosen and predestined? Almost all the bible believing Christians agree that scripture teaches two important truths and that at times seem to be in conflict. First, God is sovereign, He rules the universe. He, **Ephesians 1:11b Works all things according to the counsel of His will.** And according to John, **Matthew 10:29b Not one sparrow will fall to the ground apart from your Father's will.** The second truth is that we, as human beings, are responsible for choices we make. We are not robots doing what we are programmed to do. Yes, we make those choices under the umbrella of God's sovereignty, but they are our choices. Many people like to say we have free will, though that is not a term the bible uses. So the bible teaches Christians have been chosen and predestined by God to be His sons, His children and it also says that Christians are those who choose to trust in Jesus Christ as savior and Lord. We are chosen by God and we choose God. How exactly do these two things fit together? I'm not totally sure. And neither are you. Nor is anyone else. Oh, the bible certainly teaches important truths about these topics, but exactly how God's sovereignty and human responsibility fit together is something that God alone understands. Thus, I think this is a topic we should approach and discuss with a bit of humility and graciousness as we seek to understand the truth God reveals.

Over the centuries Christians have basically ended up in two camps as they have thought about these issues, Arminian that emphasizes human responsibility and Calvinists that emphasize God's sovereignty. There is a third, more modern view referred to as corrupt election. This says Ephesians 1 is only talking about Christian being God's chosen people, just as Israel was God's chosen people in the Old Testament. In other words, all Paul is saying is God chooses Christians, instead of Hindus, for example, to be His children. There are many problems with that view, but I am not going to spell those out today. If you think it has some merit, I would be glad to chat with you later.

Let's first consider the Arminian view that says God chooses those who He knows will choose Him. Our choice is the basis for His choice. This view is not named after the country of Armenia, but after Jacob Arminius, a protestant reformer in the late 1500's. He claimed that before the world began God looked ahead to the future and saw all the people who would choose to accept Christ. So, way back then He predestined those individuals to be His children. Even though chronologically, God first chose us, He did so on basis of the choice we would make in the future. The verse these folks point to is **Romans 8:29a** where the apostle Paul says, **"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.** Arminians claim this verse means God's foreknowledge of who would receive Christ determines who He predestines or chooses. However, in the bible, God's foreknowledge seems to involve more than prediction. Suppose last Sunday I has said, "The Packers will beat the Lions 37-17." My prediction would have been correct. But I had absolutely zero influence on the outcome of the game. If Aaron Rodgers would have predicted that score, he would not only have been correct, but would have helped it occur.

Now, God is much greater than Aaron Rodgers. When He says something will happen, it happens, even if He has to make it happen. That is what Paul means by foreknowledge. God obviously knew who the people were He was predestining, but this verse doesn't really say anything about choosing on the basis of who would have faith. One thing that strikes me is that God not only knew I would believe in Jesus in 1969, but He also knew I would believe Jesus in the particular circumstance to which I was born and lived. (Acts 17:26) God not only knows who will receive and reject Christ in the world He created, but He also knows what everyone would have done if He made the world differently. If I would have been born in the Mountains of Tibet instead of Northern Wisconsin, would I be a Christian? The point is that God's decision to create as He did almost certainly have an impact on our choices. Now, you could argue that because God knew I was going to choose to trust in Jesus He made sure I was born in Northern Wisconsin where I would hear the gospel message. But that, at least in my mind, comes pretty close to making salvation something I deserve, rather than it being by grace, through faith in Jesus alone. So, in summary, the Arminians believe we choose God and that is why

He chose us. It is an appealing view for a variety of reasons and held by some wonderful Christians, including some good friends. However, I am not convinced it is consistent with what the bible teaches.

The second perspective people have on this topic is usually called the Calvinist view, associated with John Calvin, the Swiss reformer of the 1500's. It maintains we choose God, put our faith in Jesus, only because He has already chosen us. Thus, as Paul says, we are predestined to become Christians and be His children. Why did God choose us? Calvinists answer, "totally out of grace and for reasons beyond our comprehension." Now, a lot of folks object to this view. They think it seems unfair and contrary to human free will. Yet, often those objections are rooted in misunderstanding. John Stott, the well-known British pastor and scholar was once asked, "Are you a Calvinist?" he responded, "Yes, I am." But on second thought asked, "What do you mean by Calvinist?" The questioner responded, "Well that is someone who believes God takes people who want nothing to do with Him and drags them kicking and screaming into heaven, and tells others who are pounding on the gates of heaven, begging to enter, 'No, you cannot come in because you have not been chosen.'" Stott replied, "Well, if that is what you mean by 'Calvinist,' then I am surely not one." Friends, if that is what you think a Calvinist is, then I am not one and I might add, I doubt John Calvin was either.

Folks, I should not and do not want to believe and preach something because John Calvin, John Bunyan, Jonathon Edwards, John Piper, John MacArthur or any other John, Tom, Dick or Harry does. I don't want to be bound to any human doctrine. I want to believe and preach what the bible teaches. And your goal should be to hear and believe what the bible teaches. It is your responsibility with this sermon, or any sermon, to prayerfully listen to what I say and then, **Acts 17:11b Search the Scriptures to see if these things are true.** On this topic I am convinced that salvation is rooted in the fact that God predestined and chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. We choose Him because He first chose us. Yes, it is still up to us to choose to believe or trust in Jesus. It is still our responsibility and privilege to tell anyone and everyone, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Here is how I sometimes explain this: God hangs a big banner over the gift of salvation that reads, **Revelation 22:17b "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who desires take the water of life freely.** In other words, anyone who wants, can come and receive this salvation for free. Yet, because of our sinful nature, because of our pride and selfishness, because of our spiritual blindness, we choose not to come and receive that salvation, if left to ourselves. **Romans 3:10** tells us there is no one who is seeking after God. **1 Corinthians 2:14** says the person without the Holy Spirit cannot understand spiritual truth. **2 Corinthians 4:4** reads **The god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.** And Jesus says, **John 6:44 No one come to Me unless the father draws Him.** I believe this means if God had not chosen me, before I was born, I would not have chosen Him after I was born. Did I know anything about this before I trusted in Jesus Christ? No, I didn't have a clue. It is only after we have trusted in the Lord Jesus and received His salvation that we are able to look back and see that the other side of the banner that reads, "Chosen by God before the foundation of the world."

Folks, the bottom line is this: the bible doctrine of predestination does not negate human responsibility. Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ and experiences God's wrath in hell does so because that is their choice. They have freely chosen to refuse the salvation God offers. Those who believe in Jesus and receive God's salvation have indeed chosen God, that has been their decision. Yet, the reason they made that choice was because God opened their eyes and gave them a thirst to know Jesus Christ. There is an old poem which captures this truth. It reads, "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew, He moved my soul to seek Him, asking me; It was not I that found, O Savior true, no, I was found by Thee."

Now, Christians certainly have different opinions on many aspects of what it means to be predestined and chosen by God. Yet, it is very important that we recognize that Calvinists, Arminians and really all bible believing Christians should agree on basic truth concerning salvation. This is a conversation that once occurred between Charles Simeon, a well-known British pastor and John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church.

Simeon said, “Mr. Wesley, I understand you are called an Arminian and I a Calvinist. I suppose we are supposed to draw verbal daggers, but before we argue, let me ask you a few questions. Do you feel yourself a depraved creature who would have never thought of turning to God if God had not first put it into your heart?” Wesley responded, “Yes, indeed, I do.” “And do you believe there is nothing you can do to please God, and look for salvation solely through the blood and resurrection of Christ?” Wesley said, “Yes, solely through Christ.” “And being first saved through Christ, are you not somehow seeking to save yourself afterwards by your own works?” “No,” Wesley replied, “I must be saved by Christ from first to last.” “Does that mean you are upheld every moment by God, as much as an infant in its’ mother’s arms?” Wesley said, “Yes, altogether.” “And is all your hope in the grace of God to bring you into His heavenly kingdom?” Wesley replied, “Yes, I have no hope but in Him.” Charles Simeon then said, “Mr. Wesley, I will then put away my dagger, for this is all my Calvinism, my election, my justification by faith, my eternal security, involves. Instead of searching for terms and phrases over which we can argue, let us cordially unite in these things on which we agree.”

So, Pastor Dan, this is all kind of interesting, but does it matter in any practical ways? Yes, I think it does. As I have studied what the bible teaches about predestination and God choosing us I believe it helps us:

First, become more humble. That is something with which I needed help. P poster shows a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. The caption reads, “I didn’t get here by myself.” As believers in Jesus, we should realize we didn’t get this way ourselves. God put us on top of the post. It is by grace that our eyes have been opened to see the truth and beauty of the gospel. Knowing that keeps me humble. If it was all about me choosing God, rather than the other way around, the I might have something of which to be proud. Maybe my intelligence, nice personality, or good sense is the key to why I trusted in Jesus. But I have nothing about which to boast. God saved me. I don’t help Him achieve my salvation. J. Vern McGee used to tell the story of a young man who wanted to join the church. The deacons examined him and asked, “How did you get saved?” He answered, “Well, God did His part and I did my part.” Fearing his doctrine was defective, they asked, “What was God’s part and what was your part?” He said,

“Well God’s part was the saving and my part was the sinning. I ran from God as fast as my sinful heart and rebellious legs could take me. God ran after me until He caught me.” Friends, the apostle Paul would say that is solid theology. That was his testimony. I did not find God. I was found by Him. **Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace are you saved through faith, and this** (the entire salvation process) **is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast.**

Second, I believe understanding predestination gives us reason to praise and worship the Lord. Paul’s words in this passage put me in awe of an awesome God. **Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.** This is the God who determines the destiny of nations, sparrows and everything in between. He is the God whose plans are never thwarted. An awesome God, but a God who loves us. Folks, I believe God loves every human being. But he doesn’t love the unbeliever the same way as He loves His children. When, as a Christian, I realize that God has chosen me, when I understand that before the creation of the world, God chose me, Dan Erickson, birthday May 25, 1957, and said, “He will be my son. I will love him with an everlasting love.” Knowing that fills my heart with gratitude and joy. Friends if you know God has chosen you, that He predestined you to be His child, your heart too should be filled with gratitude and joy which overflows in worship. And one day we will join the multitude of heaven in declaring **Revelations 7:11 Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!**