

Ephesians 1:4 "Did God Choose Us, Or Did We Choose Him?"

Did God choose us, or did we choose him? Or does God choose us based on us choosing him where man's free will is the final word on who is saved and who isn't.

Our text today is on the heels of the encouraging message we looked at last time that dealt with the blessings each of God's people in Christ have received where Paul exclaims.

EPH 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

You know, the irony here is that this verse is addressed to Christians everywhere in every age, including today where, for example, Christians in communist China or certain Muslim countries around the world, are being persecuted for their faith, and who have little in the way of material things, and yet they too have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. Spiritual blessings are the blessings that ultimately carry the greatest weight. And the first heavenly blessing in Christ that Paul identifies here in this letter to the Ephesians is found in our text today.

Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

The focus of this verse is on the one who chooses or is the cause of election – who, according to this verse is God - and His purpose - that his chosen ones be holy and blameless before Him in Christ.

Though the object of God's love and election is toward human beings this verse is primarily about God, who is Sovereign, and who shows us why He should be praised. God's choosing is grace in action as he extends a spiritual blessing in Christ to his people who deserve only his wrath.

This is a fantastic spiritual blessing from God. He chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world. Do you know what that means? Before God created anything, including man, and even before man sinned, from all of eternity God chose a people to spend their lives with Him forever more.

That is amazing. Some people might think that God, after creating man, was taken by surprise when man sinned and then our Lord went to plan "B" to fix this problem. No, that's not what our Sovereign God did. Before God caused anything to come into existence, He chose his own in Christ. He knew us by name, if you will, and then purposed that in time He would send His Son to redeem and reconcile us back to the Father us, so that we would be with Him.

But even as He chose His people in Christ before the foundation of the world, this necessarily means that the eternal Son of God must also be chosen to come into this world, which was not yet created, to die for the penalty of our sin. This is what the apostle Peter clearly says when addressing the church.

1PE 1:18-21 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

How can this be? How can God make plans to atone for the sins of men, if men have not yet been created? Isn't that a bit pre-mature? When we come to a teaching like this, we are prone to ask more questions than mere humans can ever answer. But the one thing we don't want to lose sight of is that this is deemed an eternal spiritual blessing by Paul who is speaking on behalf of God.

But the plain truth before us today is simply something that can't be ignored; God has chosen a people, in Christ, before the foundations of the world. That is, if we believe this to be God's very word that teaches on the sovereignty of God in all things. The Scriptures actually put forth this teaching of God sovereignly choosing throughout both Old and New Testaments. In fact, this should not surprise us as God is sovereign over his entire creation and does all things according to his will, including making choices where he consults no one but himself.

Psalms 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

Jeremiah 27:5 It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me.

One very important choice that God makes, after creating the universe, is seen on day six of creation when he created the first human being, Adam. Now keep in mind that Adam would necessarily fall into the same category as Paul describes in our text as being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world for God's purposes. And so, when God created him, He was creating someone who was chosen to be placed in that Garden to represent all of man-kind.

Adam did not volunteer to be put into that Garden. Adam did not physically exist until God fashioned him from the dust of the ground as He then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; not just physical life, but spiritual life as well.

We see God making sovereign choices all throughout the Old Testament. He chose Isaac's son Jacob to be the one through whom the seed of the Messiah would come. He could have chosen his brother Esau, but He didn't. Why? Because it pleased God to make His choice, who was Jacob.

In fact, when Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he brought this very thing up when he wrote in ROM 9:10-16 Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls - she was told, The

older will serve the younger. Just as it is written: Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

It's usually at this point we humans have a tendency to recoil at such an idea that God will dispense mercy and grace at His own Sovereign discretion. How dare you God, is the attitude of some. Paul knew this was an issue for people even in his day which is why he raises the question and then quickly answers it: What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!

If God is the One who made us, then why can't God make choices where He doesn't consult with us? In fact, we see this aspect of God's sovereign will in a series of rhetorical questions God asked of Job who began to question God's goodness in his own life.

Job 38:2-4 Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

If it is God's choice to glorify himself in the way he worked in Job's life, for example, then the creator has a reason for such things that we may or may not understand. But the bottom line is that whatever God chooses to do it is because he is Creator God.

This certainly leads to the next question as it relates to him choosing a people before the foundations of the world. On what basis does God choose? I mean, does He have some list of criteria that He goes down to see if we would be a good candidate? Does He see some intrinsic good in any of us and exclaim before eternity, this one would be a great choice?

How many good people did God see down the road in eternity past? Well, Paul also addressed this when writing to the church in Rome. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.

This sounds like no one deserves to come into Christ's Kingdom. This sounds rather hopeless. That's the point. None of us deserve to spend eternity with our Creator. None of us deserve to be the recipients of God's love and favor because we are by nature, in Adam, children of wrath who hate God because of our sin as Jesus points out.

John 3:19-20 This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

And yet, God has chosen to bring a people to Himself despite themselves. Take Abraham for instance. What was so lovely about a man living in the land of Ur of the Chaldees whose father, family and likely himself, served other gods? As Joshua points out.

Joshua 24:2-3 Joshua said to all the people, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, *namely*, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.

It was God's choice to choose Abraham, to lead Abraham through all the land of Canaan, and then to give Abraham a child by the name of Isaac and then through Isaac God gave him Jacob, the very one through whom God birthed the nation of Israel. And by the way, what was so lovely about Israel that God would choose them? Remember, the nation Israel came about as the result of 10 brothers conspiring to kill, but subsequently settled on selling their brother Joseph into slavery. There's a wonderful quality. That certainly qualifies them to be chosen of God.

Joseph, along with his father Jacob, who is also called Israel, and his family, end up spending some 400 years in Egypt. Much of that time they had forgotten their God, until God chose Moses to lead them out. Why did God even bother? Actually, the answer might surprise most of us.

DEU 7:7-8 The LORD did not set his affection on you [Israel] and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God loved Israel and chose them because He sovereignly chose to set them apart for His purpose, despite their sin and rebellion. And that purpose was to bring the Messiah, whom we already saw, was chosen before the foundation of the world to redeem a people chosen before the foundation of the world. He chose Abraham and promised him that through his seed there would be a multitude who would come from him and would be blessed.

Part of that multitude was Israel. But that multitude was never meant to be limited to only one nation. The multitudes God has chosen includes every person who has or ever will embrace the Messiah, Jesus Christ by faith, Jew or Gentile.

But God's choice of us had nothing to do with how He would see us in the future as wanting to embrace Christ. Remember, we were chosen before the foundation of the world "in Christ."

We weren't chosen because of some future event concerning our faith. Keep in mind, this salvation is a "gift" from God in which none of us can boast. If God chose us based on what He saw us doing in the future, then that would not be considered a Sovereign choice. In fact, that would be no choice at all since we would be the ones who determined how He would act.

In that case He would simply be reacting to something He saw us do. That could hardly be considered election or choosing us before the foundations of the world. We aren't

ultimately chosen of God because He saw that we would believe. We believe because we were chosen by God.

The initiative is always God's, based on His grace. Salvation is not some accident or after-thought on the part of God. God's purpose is always to draw His people to Himself. God's purpose is rooted in the depths of His nature which is His love, but also includes His wrath. God is the kind of God who actively and sovereignly loves and seeks a people for His glory as He brings them out from under His wrath and delivers them into His grace and peace, through His Son.

2TH 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This means eternal life comes through the work of the Spirit who enables us to believe in the truth of the Gospel, found in Christ, which people, like Paul and others down through the ages, have proclaimed.

This gets to the issue of why God must choose a people for Himself before the foundation of the world. If God had not chosen a people, the harsh reality is that no one would come to God. In fact, this is precisely what Paul said back in **Romans 3:11** no one seeks for God. Why? He answers this question in ROM 8:7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.

The word hostile in this verse, as in the sinful mind is hostile to God, is a Greek word that can be translated enmity. Enmity is the active state of being opposed to someone, with the implication of being an enemy of someone. And how many people are at war with God?

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Therefore, all of us, in Adam, are by nature enemies of God as we are identified as children of wrath

Ephesians 2:1-3 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

This is the reason that God must choose a people in Christ before the foundation of the world, which is precisely what Jesus confirms during His earthly ministry as He defines His mission in coming into this world.

John 6:39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

Who are the one's given by the Father to the Son? All of those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. These are the ones who are given the ability to come to the Father through the Son.

JOH 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Don't lose me here. Salvation is God's gift of grace, which no one deserves. It is God's to give or not. This is why the psalmist puts salvation in terms that makes it entirely of the Lord.

Psalm 3:8 Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing *be* upon Your people!

Salvation does not belong to mankind. It has been gifted to mankind by God. Salvation belongs to God to graciously give to those who are given by the Father to the Son. These are the same people who are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, not to merely make salvation possible for them, but to fulfill the Father's mission to which Christ was sent to effectually secure salvation for his people; the very one's Jesus identifies as his sheep. In fact, Jesus makes it clear that only his sheep have the capacity to follow Him precisely because they have been chosen by the Father. This is what Jesus addressed when speaking to unbelieving Jews during his earthly ministry.

John 10:26-28 But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

The unbelieving people whom Jesus refers to in these verses are the same people who kept rejecting him throughout his ministry and he gave them the same truth back in chapter 8 of the gospel of John.

JOH 8:43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

God the Father, along with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit made a choice in eternity past to choose a people in the Son as the Son was to be sent into the world by the Father to redeem a sinful people who would in turn, now belong to God as Christ would purchase them with his own blood. It would be the Holy Spirit who would open the spiritual eyes of God's people to hear and respond to the message of hope found in the risen Christ.

In fact, this was the message Jesus gave to a Pharisee named Nicodemus as our Lord told him in no uncertain terms that he must be born again, or born from above if he was to see the kingdom of God. Jesus was suggesting that Nicodemus or anyone else can spiritually birth themselves, it is a birth that only the Spirit of God can accomplish in the life of a person as Jesus told Nicodemus.

John 3:5 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus was referencing a birth outside of Nicodemus, a spiritual birth that only the Spirit of God can accomplish in the life of one of his people, as he utilizes the phrase being born of water and the Spirit. The reference Jesus notes is found in the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 36:24-28 For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

This passage in Ezekiel is addressing the nation of Israel, but Israel is being spoken of here in an eschatological way as they serve as a copy and shadow of heavenly things, as the writer of Hebrews makes clear, thus Israel represents all of God's people in Christ who will ultimately live in a land flowing with milk and honey to find its ultimate expression in the ultimate Promised land, the new heavens and new earth.

Revelation 21:1-3 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

But many will protest that Christ died for the sins of the entire world, and that each individual has the capacity to believe. But this brings us right back to the dilemma that according to Paul, there are none who seek after God, there are none who do good, not one, because they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

If men are dead in their trespasses and sins, then they are not half dead with some spark of life in them which enables them to believe. They are dead as dead can be. The coroner in the Wizard of Oz could teach us something here on the nature of death as he addressed all the munchkins regarding the demise of the wicked witch of the east: "she's not only merely dead, she's really most sincerely dead." Dead men don't believe, in fact dead men don't do much of anything.

This doesn't mean that the command for all men to repent and believe is some empty command. It is first and foremost a declaration that there is only one source for salvation that has come into the world.

Isaiah 43:11 "I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me.

God's decree goes hand in hand with God's command to be saved through Jesus Christ. The decree and man's responsibility to repent and believe doesn't negate man's dead sinful nature that is at war with God. It is God's grace and His grace alone that will determine

who lives. Pharaoh was commanded by God to let his people go. Was that an empty command despite Pharaoh being hardened by God not to respond to that command? In fact, what does God tell us about Pharaoh in relationship to Him choosing a people for himself according to His will?

Romans 9:15-18 For He says to Moses, I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION. So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills (free will?) or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH. So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

But immediately we say that isn't fair. Why would God choose to save some but not all? Well, Paul has an answer for that as well.

Romans 9:19-21 You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will? On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? 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?

The mercy that God shows to men is entirely up to Him. Now I know, there is a tendency to speak to supposed man's free will to choose or not to choose God, (which by the way is only free to choose those things in accordance with his nature, which is dead) and yet there is the propensity to divorce that same courtesy to our Almighty God. God doesn't simply make salvation possible, He actually and effectually saves those whom the Father gives to the Son.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.

Who are the ones who come to Christ? All that the Father gives to Christ. Jesus goes on to say a few verses later.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.

Man's inability to come to Christ because he is dead is overcome by the only One who can give life. Remember, Lazarus didn't respond to Christ's command to come out of that tomb until he was first made alive, and then he was able to respond. In the same way, people who are dead in their trespasses and sins cannot respond to spiritual life until the Spirit causes them to be born from above, or born again.

To ask, how much is God's part and how much is man's part in relationship to salvation is misguided. This type of reasoning assumes that human beings and God must work together in some synergistic way to make salvation effectual in the life of a person. Thus, my free will determines my salvation, is the battle cry.

All men are called to personally repent and believe, and those chosen before the foundation of the world will, and He will raise us up on the last day. And since we are called to take the gospel to everyone it is not our job to determine who was chosen before the foundations of the world in Christ, but to declare God's salvation in His Son to everyone as we testify to Christ's grace and mercy given to anyone of his choosing.

Paul is worshipping God in this letter to the Ephesians because he knows he deserves nothing from Christ. He knows the Lord has chosen him despite his sinful and rebellious past and he knows this is a blessing from God in Christ.

If anyone wonders if they're elect and chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world, I would simply encourage you to consider, in whom have you trusted? If you truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are chosen, because you are in Christ. And you are in Christ because you were chosen before the foundations of the world.

This should encourage our hearts, because we who have been chosen before the foundation of the world, and have believed on Christ, are assured that we will be with Him after this present cursed world is long gone to enjoy Him forever in the new heavens and new earth in our glorified resurrected bodies.

In this way, God gets all the glory which belongs to Him exclusively. Praise God that everyone who truly repents and calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And let us praise God, together with Paul who tells us in ROM 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This predestination that Paul addresses here in Romans is the same predestination he brings up in the next verse of our text as we'll explore the connection between God choosing a people in Christ before the foundation of the world that necessarily leads to predestination or foreordaining as we will see when we get back together next time.

Rejoice that your names were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, not because you or I deserved it, but because God is gracious in bringing us into His Kingdom and giving us life in His Son who tells us in.

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

These are the ones given to the Son by the Father who were chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world. If you know him and love him, through faith in his redemptive work, rejoice that he first loved you in Christ.