

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

Sometimes in our prayers we will come before God and ask that He bless us or that He might bless others we pray for. And there's nothing wrong in asking God for such blessings. And yet it's always important to keep in mind that God has already blessed us. He has already given to us all things in Christ. To be "in Christ" speaks of a union which cannot be broken, a relationship that affects our whole life, with Christ being the source of our salvation and blessings.

And so when we pray, God bless us, it's not as though we are without God's blessing. We simply may not see the blessing which already exist, or we may not recognize the blessing we possess.

The verse we ended with last week sheds some light on this.

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."

He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. You know, the irony here is that this verse is addressed to Christians all over the world in every age. Christians in communist China, who are being persecuted for their faith, and who have nothing in the way of material things, have the same promise a wealthy person has in the United States who have all their material needs met.

How often we forget that there are Christians who have nothing, materially speaking, and yet have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. How soon we forget that spiritual blessings are the blessings that ultimately mean the most.

We complain if our cable goes out for a few minutes, or the automatic ice machine quits, when in parts of the world today people don't have fresh water to drink because the wells have dried up or they have no place to lay their head because they've lost their home to an earthquake in some remote part of the world.

We need to reevaluate what blessings God wants us to consider as a priority in our lives. I suspect that had Paul received a shiny new chariot to cruise around the world in he would not have given it as much importance as what he is about to speak of in the rest of this chapter.

Can we praise God for material blessings? Of course, and we should. But when we focus on the material as "the" measure of what a blessing should be then we've already lost sight of the eternal significance of these blessings spoken of in verse three.

God wants us to see past this world and the things of this world as He desires for us to view all things from an eternal aspect. It's when we begin to see the world through God's eyes that we see blessings coming from His hand that we couldn't see or wouldn't recognize if we were only focused on this world.

2CO 4:18 "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

I was talking to my wife a couple of days ago about Jim Elliot, the missionary who went to share the gospel with the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He was a man who spent his life preparing to go down to South America to share Christ. When he was in Wheaton College he would only eat fruits and vegetables thinking that this is the only kind of food that would be available to him. He would often spend up to eight hours a day in prayer and meditation on God's word. He wanted to be prepared.

He was fully aware of the dangers of going into the inner jungle and yet he was compelled by the Spirit to go. Years were spent getting ready for this day to make contact with the Auca Indians. For days they would fly over the region where they believed the Indians were encamped and they would drop blankets and gifts to pave the way.

On that fateful day when they actually landed and made contact they felt that this was now the time when Christ would bless their efforts and bring these people to Christ. Jim Elliot told his wife that if they didn't contact them by a certain time to come look for them.

The time went by and search parties were sent out. They found the bodies of all five men speared to death. No survivors. Years later Jim's wife Elisabeth Elliot actually went back to live with the Auca's and to bring the gospel to them. Many were saved.

But the nagging thought still remained with her. Why did they kill those men who only wanted to befriend the Indians? She learned 33 years later, when the wife of one of the men returned to the scene of the killings. She met a woman named Dawa, a teen-ager

at the time of the killings, who was part of the Auca tribe and knew the story.

It turned out that since the Auca's never wore clothes they had no concept of what a pocket was. When Jim Elliot and his party met up with these Indians everything was actually going very well, according to Dawa, until one of the men pulled a photograph out of their pants pocket of a young Auca girl who had run away from the tribe. He took the photo out to see if they recognized her.

Suddenly everything turned ugly. The picture was perceived as one of their tribe who had been eaten by this white man and was now being taken out of his body. They killed the missionaries. But then Dawa, this Indian woman, then shared that as the men lay dead on the beach the tribe suddenly saw bright lights flashing all around them over the tops of the trees and they saw a large group of people singing. They were terrified and ran back to their villages.

It wasn't until five years later when the gospel was actually given to this tribe that they all remembered that heavenly scene and then knew that God was there in their midst. Dawa was one of the first to believe on the Lord Jesus and many others were persuaded that this God was the one true God and His Son loved them enough to die for their sins, even though they had killed these missionaries.

Where was the blessing? Was it in Jim Elliot and his party being killed for their faith? Yes and no. The families were grieved over the loss. And yet it was the direct result of Jim's death which inspired many more missionaries to go out into the field to do the work of the gospel. Many Indians in that region came to know Christ precisely because of the work Jim Elliot never got to do.

We may never understand the why's of God, but we do know that God's ways are not always our ways. We have all the blessings we need in Christ and we simply need to trust that however God blesses we are willing to see His Sovereign hand in it.

But as Paul continues in this letter he begins to glory in these blessings which every believer possesses. These are the blessings which are unmistakable and should cause our hearts to soar no matter what else is going on in our lives.

Look at the first blessing Paul addresses in EPH 1:4 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

The focus of this text is on the cause of election - God - and its purpose - that Christians be holy and blameless before Him in Christ.

Though the object of God's love and election is human beings this verse is primarily about God, Who is Sovereign, and Who shows us why He should be praised. God is at work, planning and drawing people to Himself in Christ. Election is grace in action.

What a fantastic spiritual blessing from God. He chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world. Do you know what that means? Before man was created, before he sinned, before you and I ever came into existence, from all of eternity God chose us to spend our lives with Him forever more.

That is amazing. Some people would 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 anything came into existence He chose us. He knew us by name, if you will, and then purposed that in time He would send His Son to redeem us, so that we would be with Him.

But even as He chose us, we also see that the Son of God was chosen to come into this world, which was not yet created, to die for the penalty of our sin. This is what Peter clearly says. 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 redeem men, if men have not been created? Isn't that a bit pre-mature? Isn't that like God having no trust in mankind to make the right decision?

It isn't a matter of God having no trust in man, it's a matter of God's Sovereign choice to do what pleases Him. Keep in mind that God is all-knowing. He knew man would sin and yet He gave man everything he needed to make the right choice. He placed man in a perfect environment. He gave man a perfect nature to be able to make this choice for God.

And yet man sinned. But God had already been prepared, from eternity, to come to man's rescue. Nothing takes God by surprise. And the love of God is infinite in its scope to the point that He would love us knowing we would reject Him.

To suggest that God has not planned all things according to the counsel of His will is to limit God, who is limitless. 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, who wants us to ponder His great love for us.

We simply cannot get around the fact that God chose us in Christ before the foundations of the world. Actually that ought to be a great blessing to each of us. To think that Christ had you and me in mind and on His heart, while on that cross, makes our salvation much more personal.

But what does it mean to be chosen? Interestingly enough Paul doesn't give any lengthy explanation here. He simply states it as a fact to be embraced by faith by each of us. But the Scriptures continually put this teaching forth in both Old and New Testaments.

The first choice God makes of a person is seen in the Garden of Eden. Now keep in mind that God had known Adam before the foundation of the world as well. 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 created him, taking his essence from the dust of the ground. He then breathed into his nostrils and gave him life; not just physical life, but spiritual life as well. Adam had a spirit which God gave him, designed, ultimately, to spend eternity with God in a resurrected physical body.

We see God making 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 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." (Gen. 25:23) Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." (Mal. 1:2,3) 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." (Exodus 33:19) 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. Paul knew this was a problem 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? Even God allows us to choose our own mates. To exercise such choice demonstrates that we are free moral agents created in God's image who is the One who chooses according to His will.

This leads us to how God chooses. I mean, does He have some list of criteria which He goes down to see if we would be good choices? Does He see some intrinsic good in any of us and exclaim before eternity, this would be a great choice?

How many good people did God see in eternity past? Well, Paul also addressed this when writing to the church in Rome. ROM 3:10-12 "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."

I thought we were talking about God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. This sounds like a drag. 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. But 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 possibly

himself, served other gods? Why did God choose Abraham and not someone else?

Through Abraham Israel was birthed. What was so lovely about Israel? The nation Israel came about as the result of 10 brothers selling their brother Joseph into slavery. There's a wonderful quality. That certainly qualifies them to be chosen of God.

They end up spending some 400 years in Egypt. Much of that time they had forgotten their God, until God raised up 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 chose to love them. They too were chosen before the foundation of the world to be a people for God. 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 nations possessing land. The multitudes God has chosen include every person who has or ever will embrace Christ by faith.

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 would see 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 were 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 predestination or choosing us before the foundations of the world. We aren't ultimately chosen of

God because we will believe. We believe because we were chosen by God.

The initiative is always Gods, based on His grace. Salvation is not some accident or after-thought on the part of God. God's purpose is always to draw humanity to Himself. God's purpose is rooted in the depths of His nature which is His love. God is the kind of God who actively and sovereignly loves and seeks a people for a relationship.

Now all of this may sound as though we had nothing to do with our choice. And it may sound somewhat fatalistic for countless others out there in the world who need to come to Christ, but who apparently have no say in what they will do with Christ.

This just isn't the case. You see, God sovereignly makes a choice to bring people into His kingdom and yet He also sovereignly chooses to provide the means to that end. Paul brings this out when writing to the Thessalonians.

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. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The means to receive this eternal life is through the work of the Spirit as we believe in the truth of the Gospel, found in Christ, which people, like Paul and others down through the ages, have proclaimed.

If you won't believe you won't be saved. I like the way Pastor Chuck describes this dilemma when talking about unbelievers who would throw it up in his face. They would say, then how do I know I'm chosen of God? And his answer is simply, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

You see it's not as though this message isn't meant for all men. This is where divisions have come up in the church over the years. They argue over the result of election and question who is elect. Some say, only certain ones are elect and therefore no matter what we do, or don't do, they will come to Christ. Others say all men everywhere are given the chance to come to Christ and that election is a fabrication of those who would take an elitist attitude.

But what does the word of God teach?

ROM 8:7 "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."

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."

JOH 8:43 "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

JER 13:23 "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil."

It seems pretty clear to me that only God is able to change the heart of a person and it seems just as clear that only those chosen before the foundation of the world will ultimately benefit from God's grace.

The problem is not having access to the truth, the problem is an inability on the part of sinful men to see their need for salvation. They are, as Paul puts it in Eph.2:1, "dead" in their trespasses and sins.

But what about passages like LUK 19:10 "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

What was lost? Part of humanity, or all of humanity?

JOH 1:29 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Is the word world all inclusive here or rather does it speak to saving men from every tribe and language and people which would certainly include men from the entire world? If there is an elect company called out by God from the world then it is certainly acceptable to say that the He came into the world that He loved to save all men from every corner that He chose.

I mean, if Christ took away the sin of the entire world why are people still held accountable for their sin if they don't believe? Either He paid the price or He didn't. Either His death and resurrection was effectual or it wasn't.

But then the protest is that, of course Christ died for the sins of the entire world, but each individual has 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.

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. 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. But from the Almighty Sovereign God's perspective setting the standard for how men are to be saved through faith in Christ alone doesn't negate the inability of men to believe, it only shows how sinful sin really is. It is grace and grace alone that will determine who lives.

As we read in Romans 9:15-16 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 or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

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. There is a tendency to speak to man's free will and yet there is the propensity to divorce that same courtesy to our Almighty God.

God doesn't simply make man savable, 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 one's who come to Christ? All that the Father gives to Christ.

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 draw us to Himself, and like Lazarus who is given new life "before" he responded to the command to come out of the tomb, God's elect are born from above and regenerated to life by the Spirit and enabled by God to come out of darkness and into the light of the gospel through faith in Christ alone.

To ask, 'how much is God's part and how much is man's part', is misguided. It assumes that human beings and God are working in some synergistic way. The truth is that salvation is entirely a work of God in which human beings are involved. God may elect, but He doesn't believe for us.

All men are called to personally repent and believe, and God's elect will, and He will raise us up on the last day.

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 and he knows this is a blessing from God in Christ.

If anyone here 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 world is long gone to enjoy Him forever in the new heavens and new earth in our glorified bodies.

In this way, God gets all the glory and that belongs to Him exclusively. Praise God that everyone who truly repents and calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And 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. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

God is active, yesterday, today and forever, initiating His love to us. Life is about a relationship with God and others. Being in Christ is another way to talk about His Lordship, and how all that we do unto His glory personally involves Him. The Church is a

community of changed people, with new natures, living out their relationship to God before the world. Our God is a God to be praised. All blessings flow from Him.

Rejoice that your names were written in heaven 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; life which all may have by believing on Him alone for salvation.