

## The Glory of God's Free Choice – Part 1

*Ephesians 1:4-6*

*“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us...”*

### Introduction:

There are a few questions that we should ask ourselves as we gather each Sunday, that I'm not sure we actually ever think about, or perhaps don't think about enough. **First, what is the basis and goal of worship this morning, or any minute of any day?** If we believe the basis of worship is something that we do or bring, it will shape our experience and expression of worship. If the goal is simply to engage our emotions, we will base the effectiveness of worship on how we feel, or how our affections were stirred from external realities. **Second, what is the purpose of your life and future?** Is our purpose to secure ourselves in this world and hold onto what we have? Is it to maximize abilities or resources? Happiness? Achievement? The answer to this question will shape our time, resources, and engagement in our time in this world. **Third, where do you derive security in life (and perhaps death)?** Is it found in material possession, careful planning, or assets accumulated? Is it based on a government structure or voting block? The answer to this question will determine the level of anxiety, fear, and angst you feel presently, in either a settled or tumultuous life.

The reality of these questions is that they really find their answer in the same source, and happen to be the focus of our text this morning. The answer is sourced in an all powerful, totally sovereign, and utterly holy God, who does every and all things for His glory! The fact that God does all things for His own glory is great news to all of us who have fallen short of it (Rom. 3:23). Displaying His glory is why God created the world, made man in His own image, and ultimately redeemed humanity to Himself in salvation. Out of the writings during the Reformation came a grouping of **5 statements** that we hold dear today, called the **5 Sola's**: **We are saved 1) by faith alone 2) through grace alone 3) by Christ alone 4) through the Word alone 5) to the glory of God alone.** These were formed during the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to distinguish from the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. They declare that salvation is NOT made up of people and God working together, each giving a little, but is an act of God alone, that He saves those who could not save themselves, and quite frankly did not recognize the need nor have the desire to BE SAVED in the first place. If we believe that people are naturally good, or not wholly sinful, we will believe that all we need is the right circumstances, or the right opportunity, or the right something to be saved, meeting God at some point in the process. This is truly a dividing line of belief:

*“Here is the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification (declaring people righteous), but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self effort.”<sup>1</sup>*

To understand what Paul addresses positively in Ephesians 1:4-6, we need to take a little sneak peek into chapter 2, as well as some other passages, or the language and wording of this precision passage will be offensive and feel negative.

When we studied Genesis 3, we observed how Adam's sin plunged humanity into death, physically, spiritually, and eternally. It also meant that we were BORN into sin (Rom. 5:12,

<sup>1</sup> J.I Packer, from “Historical and Theological Introduction” in *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther, 58-59.

19), connected by Adam in sin and death. Our condition, then, before Christ is NOT one of mild or medium plight, but our death and hopelessness was complete.

**Romans 3:9-12** - *“What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’”*

**Romans 3:23** - *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

**Romans 6:17, 19, 20** - *“...but thanks be to God that you who were once **slaves of sin...**”; ‘For just as you once presented your members as **slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness...**’; “For when you were **slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness.”*

**Colossians 2:13** - *“And you, **who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh**, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.”*

**Ephesians 2:1-3** - *And you **were dead in the trespasses and sins** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience - among whom we all once lived in **the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind**, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

What picture does this paint of us? Not a pretty one!!! When we entered this world, these things were true of all of us: We were not righteous or good, and the last thing we did was to seek after God. All of the good we tried to do was worthless before God. In living for our own glory and not His, we sinned by definition. This sinful reality meant that we were, by nature, slaves to sin rather than free to choose righteousness and DEAD in terms of our ability to choose God. In both Colossians and Ephesians, the word “dead” means dead. A person who is unable to breathe, choose, or set its own course. In fact, much like a dead and gutted fish, we simply flow down whatever river they are thrown in, not choosing which way to go, but simply going where the river takes them. The choices are out of passions of the flesh, desires of the body, and desires of the mind. These choices are only as free as the realm of captivity we were in. In other words, we were very much like a person in prison or an animal at the zoo; free to move about, make choices, and do good things, but only within the confines of captivity.

Sheesh. That’s laying it on thick, don’t you think?! Why do we START there? If we understand where we ALL start, we elevate and magnify the greatness of what God did in our salvation. You see, Ephesians 1:3-14 is incredibly POSITIVE in tone! Paul is not arguing or correcting, he is encouraging and giving reason to worship. Sometimes we stay away from these admittedly hard ideas or doctrines, but not only did Paul NOT shy away, he shows how VITAL these doctrines are to our worship, joy, and obedience.

Just a quick word before unpacking this text: If you have tension with these verses, you are in a good spot. I’ve been taught these truths since I could first understand them, wrestling with my grandpa over these concepts in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, as my mind melted a little bit. I had the privilege of having my dad sit down with me before I left for college and explain the Doctrines of Grace (or the acronym TULIP). But I also know this is a tough doctrine emotionally. I’ve had several people in my ministry experience get upset with me for believing/teaching God’s sovereign choice in salvation. Typically, I simply point them back to Scripture (especially this passage) to allow them to argue there. All that said, we are going to try to answer some

common questions and sticking points in a couple of weeks, so if you HAVE questions, hold onto them and we will cover most of them then. Today, we want to simply delight in these foundational truths given to us, that enliven our worship, clarify our purpose, and secure our lives now and the future.

**Purpose of God's Free Choice: A Holy People (4)**

*...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love"*

First off, look at the layout of this section. Verses 3-6 focus on God the Father, vv. 7-12 on Jesus Christ, and vv. 13-14 on the Holy Spirit. The first section speaks to what happened in eternity past, the second in the present, and the third to eternity future. The first to God's selection, the second to Christ's sacrifice and the third to the Spirit's sealing. The first results in adoption, the second in redemption, and the third possession (of inheritance). Note that the first section end with "to the praise of His glorious grace" (6), the second "to the praise of his glory" (12), and the third "to the praise of His glory" (14). Salvation is an act of God, planned out in eternity past, executed for us in the present, with implications for eternity. Each member of the Trinity played a vital role, and people were redeemed for the ultimate goal of God's glory! If you don't feel anything in your heart, mind and soul, you are missing a pulse!

Words matter, especially here. We will see in a couple of weeks how the word "*foreknowledge*" is often used to challenge the idea of God's choosing us for salvation. But here, the word simply means "to choose". He chose us. Now, we need to make a few observations of this word in its context. 1) The subject of this verb is, as in most instances of the OT and NT, God Himself. 2) This is a positive statement rather than one of rejection, speaking only of those chosen, not of those who are not. 3) The verb is in the *middle voice*, indicating a personal interest in the one chosen, meaning this was not a cold, impersonal choice; 4) the one who is chosen has no legal claim on the one who chooses. God was under **no obligation** to choose anyone but freely chose some for salvation as evidence of His great grace.

I often think of a picture in my mind when it comes to God choosing some for salvation. We often think, in some form, that people are in a mob outside the gates of heaven, desperate to scale over the wall, with God giving a divine stiff arm to most and only letting some in. In reality, we were ALL running a hell bound race, sprinting headlong to Hell, shouting our angst against God on the way. If God had NOT acted at all, every single human being would run off the cliff, all the while claiming we were God and knew best. The real question to answer is NOT why did God save some and not others, but rather why did **God choose any at all?!!** **If we believe, it is reason to rejoice and praise, for God chose us, somehow, in His infinite love, mercy and grace.** He did this *in Christ*, since Christ HAD to bring about redemption and righteousness, which we could not accomplish by ourselves.

To further explain the nature and timing of God's choice, Paul says clearly that this choice took place "*before the foundation of the world*". The word foundation was the word "throwing down" (from *kataballo*), used of stones being thrown down for the foundation or the starting point of a building. Before God spoke the earth into existence, before we were conceived, before we sinned, before we acted in rebellion, God chose us. This was not conditional, where God saw our good work or choice of Him down the corridor of time. This was a free choice that He made. In fact, Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 both say that the names written in the Book of Life were there *before the foundation of the world*. To illustrate how this works, we look at how God chose Israel in the OT.

Deuteronomy 7 lays out the history and promise God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12, to make his name and nation great. When entering into the Promised Land, God would clear away nations who were stronger and more numerous than they were (7:1) so they could possess the land and live distinctly unto God Himself. Then God said, ***“The LORD you God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the people who are on the face of the earth.”*** (7:6). How did God choose? Was it some beauty or talent contest where nations auditioned and showed their ability to sing, dance, or do magic tricks and He held up score cards? Fantastically, He simply said this:

*“It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers...”* (7:7-8a)

Israel was small, rebellious, and weak. But they were loved. Infinitely, completely, and proactively loved by God. And it wasn't that Israel turned out to be a faithful, kind, and strong nation. They lasted for about 100 years of consolidated strength. No, God chose them because He loved them.

If you are here today and you believe in Jesus Christ, your eyes have been opened to your sin, your need for a Savior, and you willingly asked for forgiveness, turning in repentance from your sin and turning to God in faith, you are **infinitely loved, before the world began. You cannot be more loved than that!** And since His love of you was based on His love, and we cannot be separated from His love (Rom. 8:39), you are loved on your best and worst days, when you have things together and when it's all falling apart. This love secures us. This love motivates us to love (1 John 4:19). This love means none of us is ever alone, that we have incredible value, and that we are WANTED. God wanted each person who believes to be a part of His church and be with Him forever. That is why Paul gives a **statement of purpose next:**

*“That should be holy and blameless before Him in love”.* What was the purpose of His lovingly choosing us in Christ? That we'd be prepared to live with Him forever. In order to be in His presence, we'd have to be categorically different than we are now. Moses learned that no one could see God and live (Exodus 33:20). We must be *holy* (set apart) and *blameless* (spotless like a Passover Lamb) to be before Him, so that is why salvation requires us to be holy. Now, this will happen in completion when we are glorified, but will progressively happen in our time on earth. **Holiness is not optional.** We are not saved by our holiness, but are saved to become holy. This also means God's church, the Body of Christ, must be holy in its pursuit of Christ and others (2 Tim. 2:20-21).

But this is also connected with “in love”. I had always thought the love was connected with the next word “predestined”, but it makes more sense to have it be connected with “holy and blameless”. In this entire section, the verbs and particles describing God's action always precede the qualifying phrases. All that said, our holiness is effected by love. **Holiness without love is sterile, impersonal, and devoid of affection, where love without holiness is mere sentiment without a foundational standard.** Love motivates us to be holy, and holiness is the basis of our love of God and others. In our culture today, love gets thrown around without a true basis, so it becomes a catch all for whoever throws out the phrase first. True love is built out of a move toward God in holiness.

**Possession of God's Free Choice: An Adopted Family (5a)**  
*“...He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...”*

The next word that trips people up is the method by which God elects us: *predestination*. The word comes from the root word “horizo”, to set a boundary, determine, or separate, from which we derive the idea of a horizon. It means to determine or mark beforehand.

Here again, is where there is **divine initiative, a free decision, with no outside persuasion, and not based on circumstances or merit.** He was not bribed by outside forces or swayed by future works. But this predestined act was not out of nowhere for nothing. There was a specific act that took place: ***adoption as sons.***

The question was posed to me this week: is this only focused on men, since we are adopted as sons? I would answer that two ways: 1) This whole section is directed to the *saints*, encompassing both men and women, so the implication is adoption of both sons and daughters. 2) The idea of adoption in Roman culture was relatively common and had to do with releasing one from the absolute control of a father and placed under the control of a new one. Even Emperors would do this, and it was so permanent and pervasive that succession could take place with adopted sons. To be an adopted son gave you all rights **and privileges of a son, from property to rights.** This meant that both men and women in the church are given rights as adopted sons!

When we are saved, we are transferred from one kingdom to another, from one master to another. We once were *children of wrath* (Eph. 2:3) and in the realm or domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). But we were transferred, as loved children, to the kingdom of the *son of God's love* (Col. 1:13). Adoption means that we have a **new family, a new name, and new relationships.** Some here this morning have had the privilege of being adopted twice, once by a family and once by God. But all of us here who believe have tasted of the goodness of adoption by God in Christ. This means that our life has deep meaning and we are part of something far greater than ourselves.

#### **Praise of God's Free Choice: A Glory on Display (5b-6)**

*"...according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved..."*

What motivated God to do all of these things (when He clearly did not have to?). He played out the **purpose, or better yet, the PLEASURE of His will.** He took delight in His plans and in carrying them out. Everything He delights in He does, and He carried out His perfect will in saving sinners, making them holy, and bringing them into His family into eternity. This was to **display His glorious grace,** to overflow all of who He is into the creation and redemption of humanity. Ultimately, that means that God received glory in in choosing out for Himself a people, a church, for His own possession, and did everything necessary to carry it out.

So, let's come back to the three questions posed in the beginning:

- 1) **What is the basis of our worship today?** Enlivened, humble, and changed hearts who have been changed from death to life, from stone to flesh, from captivity to freedom. We are not only freed up to worship, but **our affections should be engaged with the reality of our redemption.** This has nothing to do with style of music, mood of the room or any other external factor. It means we have been saved to worship from the heart, and we do that each and every day.
- 2) **What is our purpose of our life and future?** We are saved to be holy and blameless in love. That means that our goal is NOT primarily material gain, or achievement, or any other type of gain in this world but to grow in holiness paired with love. We seek to love God and others as a highest value and goal, not a nice complement to everything else.
- 3) **Where do we find our security?** We are secure in our belief because of God's free choice of us in Christ. In a day and age where the fear of insecurity looms large, with decisions about vaccinations, jobs, moving, threats, and tyranny, we must not look to what is seen, but to what is unseen. We cling by faith to the One who chose and loves

us, who moved heaven and earth to redeem us, and who made us part of His family.  
So, we fight for joy and calm during time of upheaval, knowing that God does all things according to the pleasure of His will.

So, we say together, with Paul and the Ephesians:

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love, He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved***