

The Glory of God's Free Choice: *Hope for Sinners* – Part 2
Ephesians 1:4-6

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

Introduction: In 1945, George Orwell introduced the world to "*Animal Farm*", a story about a group of animals who revolt against their human farmer, desiring to set up a more perfect society where animals could be equal, free, and happy. However, along the way the ideals were betrayed and the conditions ended up worse than before under the dictatorship of its vocal leader and domineering force, a pig named Napoleon, who ended up working with humans, and by the end of the story, when the animals looked in the house, they could no longer distinguish between the humans and the pigs.

When the rebellion began, one of the most important tenets of belief was that "all animals are equal", but along the way, as power was consolidated among certain animals, particularly the pigs, the phrase changed to "**All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.**" In this statement, Orwell made a central point through the use of *paradox*, a statement of truth that did not seem to make logical sense. The reader is left to interpret this point, but it is clear he was making a point that certain governments in the 1940's were claiming everyone was equal, when that was clearly false. Certain forms of government championed the cause of equality only to be ruled by a few, where only a particular class gained wealth and ease on the backs of everyone else.

Paradox is as useful as a tool as it can be frustrating. It makes two SEEMINGLY absurd or contradictory statements that when investigated or explained will prove to be true or well founded. Here are some examples of paradox:

- Save money by spending it (Costco's mission statement I think)
- If I know one thing, it's that I know nothing
- This is the beginning of the end
- Deep down, you're really shallow (some have heard this on dates)
- What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young" - George Bernard Shaw
- "I can resist anything but temptation." - Oscar Wilde
- Here are the rules: Ignore all rules

Two weeks ago, we looked at a Biblical paradox (perhaps *the* Biblical paradox) of God's sovereignty and human responsibility as it pertains to salvation. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus to encourage them about their **settled position with God in Christ**. The goal of salvation is holiness and blamelessness before Him as adopted sons and daughters for eternity. This salvation was a **result** of God playing out the *pleasure of His will, to choose for Himself, by Himself, and to Himself a group of people who would inherit a sure standing and future with Him*. This was determined before the world began, and was put into effect with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was given as a settled reality, to encourage the church, and remind us that we are loved, resourced, and secure, which should give us confidence, embolden our worship, and grant us rest.

When we speak of something being a *Biblical Paradox*, we are NOT saying that it is obscure or unimportant. What we ARE saying is that there are certain truths that are difficult for us to get our minds around. We are finite and fallible beings, living in a fallen world with minds corrupted by sin. We have been programmed our entire lives to think of self outward, to draw logical conclusions, to trust our own thinking, and to reject things that we may not understand. But we also understand that God's ways are much greater than our own, His

thoughts beyond ours, and that He does NOT have to prove Himself, nor run things by us when He acts.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 29:29

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9

In other words, God thinks, acts, and works fundamentally differently than us, and we can only comprehend up to what He has revealed, and cannot handle beyond that. This is good news. God is distinct from us, who actually can answer prayer, affect the world, and redeem the lost. We want to know what God knows, or at least have the longing questions of our mind and heart answered. But the fact is, not only can we NOT understand them all, if we did, we'd be god, and we'd be puny gods at that. So, when we live with the fact that God is **transcendent**, it becomes a foundation of trust and faith. Far too often our problem is that we try to answer the King Kong questions of life with a Curious George type of understanding or belief in the sovereignty of God.

Why is this important? When it comes to the paradox of salvation, there is a deep sense of **mystery**, areas that we have to simply trust in the goodness and love of God to answer. No one can truly figure out or comprehend the depths of God's wisdom, and there will always be questions we cannot answer. However, **what God HAS given us to know we seek to understand so that we can know Him in the fullness of His revealed self.** So, we live in the tension of paradox, trusting a God who is involved in the broad and narrow, the big and small, the ultimate and intimate, the joyful and sorrowful, in suffering and salvation (Phil. 1:29). His grace is lavished on us in all things.

So, here are some questions that we naturally ask in terms of God's eternal election, choosing, and predestination of those whom He saves (in no particular order):

- If God chooses us for salvation, what does that do to our free will? Are we simply robots? Is God simply manipulating us?
- What about the “all” and “world” passages of Scripture, where the call is to whoever will believe, not the elect?
- If God chooses for salvation, what does that do to our responsibility? Is it my fault for unbelief? Where does faith come in?
- If God chooses beforehand, doesn't that diminish the need or motivation for evangelism?

First of all, these are good questions, and the right ones (not simply because I posed them). If you've read the Bible or thought about these doctrines, these questions, or some forms have crossed your mind, especially if you have unsaved family members or friends that you've prayed for and have yet seen come to the Lord. **Second**, we will do our best not to “proof text”, meaning just look at the texts that support a conclusion. We must wrestle with God's sovereign choice because that's what the Bible says, AND with the fact that He loved all the world and desires all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). We cannot say, “I don't believe in predestination”, because that would be disbelieving a clear Biblical word and teaching. We must try to keep the whole counsel of Scripture in play. **Third**, like many who have gone before, in wrestling through Scripture, we will not let disagreement divide us. We acknowledge that since this doctrine plunges us into the deep end of the pool, we will be that

much more gracious when we disagree at some finer points (John Piper wrote an over 700-page book to answer one related question). **Fourth, and perhaps most importantly**, we want to rest, trust, and stand on the sovereignty of our God! When we face job loss because of governmental overreach, loss of a mother and friend, or the unknown of moving to plant a church, we double down on the fact that God is an all-consuming fire, glorious, without equal, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, and to Him be glory forever, amen! (Rom. 11:35)

We want to survey **Romans 9 and 10**, which I believe will answer most (if not all) the questions posed. The first 8 chapters of is an overview of the gospel itself, from its theme verse in 1:16-17, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

From 1:18-3:20 we see the whole earth is condemned in their sin

From 3:21-5:21 we see that God provides righteousness and justifies sinners in Jesus

From 6:1-8:39 we see that believers are sanctified in the demonstration of God’s righteousness

Chapters 9-11 tell how God will restore Israel and fulfill His promises. But we also see an **application of the gospel**, and illustration of God’s Divine Sovereignty (ch. 9) and Man’s responsibility (ch. 10).

- 1) **Paul’s heart for the lost (Jews) displayed** (9:1-5; 10:1) *“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (9:3); *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.”* (10:1)

Paul had an unparalleled passion to see unbelievers receive the message of the gospel. Being a recipient of the gospel in the most unlikely of ways, he knew the transformative power of Jesus’ work on his behalf, moving him from seeking to murder Christians and snuff out the church to being willing to endure suffering and death to see the church grow in Christ. His mission was to reach the Gentiles with the gospel, but his primary starting point and heart was always for his own people, the Jews. He knew that they were God’s chosen people, given every privilege that God could give humanity: adoption, glory, covenants, the law, Temple worship and promises, which culminated in the birth of Messiah, Jesus Christ. Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations, savoring God through Messiah Jesus, and calling all nations to do the same. But Paul had tension. He had **great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart** (v. 2). Despite the promises, Israel had rejected Messiah Jesus. He knew this intimately since he was the poster child for this rejection, just as he knew that all had not been rejected since Christ saved him (Rom. 11:1-2). He so desired to see his countrymen saved that he was willing to sacrifice himself for their sake, even willingly being cut off from his precious Christ. We will see that Paul dug deep into God’s sovereign choice, but that did not diminish his zeal to see the lost come to Christ.

- 2) **God’s free and divine choice explained** (9:6-13) *“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”* (9:6)

The question was begged: *If God chose Israel, and many of Israel were not saved, had God failed?* Here is the tough answer: *God never intended for all of Israel to be saved.* God had ordained that some were children of flesh (Israel by birth) and those by promise (Israel by faith). He then explained the children born to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau. *“Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad -- in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls --*

she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, “**Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated.**” (9:11-13). God chose the people of promise and the means of promise. He chose to extend the promise through Isaac and Rebekah, not Hagar. He chose Jacob, not because he was better than Esau or more faithful than Esau (quite contrary), but because **he chose to. That is THE answer, and really the answer to most of our questions.** God could have left it there, but He went on to explain further, ***anticipating our questions!***

- 3) **Anticipated questions answered (9:14-29)** - “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part?” (9:14); “You will say to the then, “Why does He still find fault? For who can resist his will?” (9:19)

I love this! Paul anticipates the natural questions that we’d ask ourselves, which is why we embrace these questions! But Paul also answers them, even though we still may not be satisfied with the answers.

Question #1 - It doesn’t seem fair that God would choose one over the other, especially since it wasn’t based on actions or works.

Answer #1 - “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 **human will or exertion (effort)**, but on **God who has mercy.**”

God takes credit for raising up kings like Pharaoh simply to proclaim His name and glory in all the earth, even going so far as hardening his heart (Exodus 14:4) so that He would get the glory. God makes free choices based on His goodness and mercy.

Question #2 - How could man be responsible? Who can resist His hardening or mercy?

Answer #2 - Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me this way?”

The answer is profound and simple: a lump of clay made into a spoon cannot shake its fist at God and demand itself to be a Swiss Army Knife. God made each person the way He wanted, to serve the purpose by which they were created. We can question God (and people do) but its as absurd as a Play-doh creation questioning the hands that created it. There are **2 realities that came out of this choice of Israel:**

First, Israel’s rejection opened up the call to the Gentiles (9:23-24).

Second, “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the **San only a remnant of them will be saved.**” (9:27). God saved and will save some of His people Israel, some like Paul already, and some still in the future. But what about the issue of **responsibility?** That question is answered next.

- 4) **Israel’s responsibility of rebellion and unbelief (9:30-10:4)** “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” (9:32)

The Bible does not frame mankind in terms of “free will”, but neither does it release us from responsibility for our actions. We are each born *free standing moral agents*, equipped with volition all choices. Before God changes the disposition of our hearts in salvation, we sin because we want to, simultaneously rejecting God and living for ourselves. Our will is free to do what it wants but is in bondage at the same time (Eph. 2:1-3). We have choices but always choose wrongly, or counter to righteousness.

Why did God reject Israel, or those who were not saved? Because they pursued God in their own brand and form of righteousness (9:31). So, they were condemned **because they sought salvation in the wrong way**. They tried to establish a righteousness on their own, demonstrating a wrong and small view of God since they thought they could reach Him on their own. In **other words, they were condemned NOT because they were not chosen, but because they were sinful in their actions**.

- 5) **The Message of Salvation is for ALL** (10:5-13) *“For the Scripture says “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; ... For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (10:11-13)*

Here is the good news: God saves sinners, and sent Jesus because He loved the world (John 3:16). The gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, to all nations, to every person. We know that *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* (Rom. 10:9), for with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (10:10). So, the gospel is presented openly to all people, and the reality is that **ANYONE WHO BELIEVES WILL BE SAVED**. **What does this mean in terms of God’s choice?** If one will bow their knee to Jesus, will ask for forgiveness, will repent and believe, we know they have been chosen by God. From our perspective, we come to a conclusion and choose to believe and repent. This comes at a point in time, from a point of clarity and conviction, and seems to be independent. But as we walk through the door of salvation and look back, we realize that written on top of the doorpost were the words, **“chosen before the foundation of the world.”**

- 6) **The Immense Privilege to Message the gospel** (10:14-21) - *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (10:17)*

Here is the final reality. Paul was motivated by the fact that all who were called would believe, and that the gospel was open to anyone, so he was motivated to proclaim the good news of the gospel. In fact, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”* (10:15). God has ordained that the means by which people will believe is by **hearing the gospel from human agents**, who proclaim boldly, fervently, and expectantly to the lost of the world. This is why the gospel can penetrate the hardest of hearts and the darkest of cultures. It’s why Paul prayed at the end of Ephesians for *“words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel* (Eph. 6:19). Far from de-motivating, the fact that God is sovereignly in control of salvation gives us great hope in sharing the gospel. Why? Because as Isaiah said, **“I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”** (Isa. 65:1; Rom. 10:20). The blind sees, the captives are set free, the oppressed released, and the deaf hear. That is the power of the gospel, proclaimed to all, that whoever believes will be saved.

This is what we celebrate at the Communion table. Salvation purchased for us to adopt us as children of promise for the purpose of holiness. We are saved by faith alone, because God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:4-7))