

Ephesians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ***just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world***, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

Where we left off last week we opened the door on this issue of *election* and God having chosen us before the foundations of the world that we would be in relationship with Him; which, by the way, is why He created a way for us to be holy and blameless. I know that sometimes words like “holy” and “blameless” come across as so religious that they lose their meaning, but they are very important and we need to grasp why Paul included them—it’s totally a relational thing and is so beautiful.

You see there a couple of presuppositions that run all the way through this letter and that is that 1) God is good—He is perfect, holy, righteous, and true—and we are not; and 2) regardless of the fact that we are not good, God still wants us to be in, and experience, a deep, passionate, and intimate relationship with Him. So He provided a remedy, a way for us to become good—holy and blameless in His sight—and that is through His Son. And while that is simply amazing, don’t take your eyes off the fact that the only reason we would need to be holy and blameless is so that we can freely come into His presence, at any time, and enjoy Him without any limitation whatsoever.

By the way, the phrase “that we would be holy and blameless” is in the present active tense, so it is our reality now. All true believers have already been made

“holy and blameless.” This is our present state of existence in the *New Creation* which Jesus gave us. Therefore, it is not something we have to wait for and it is not something we progressively achieve; it is our reality when we choose to live from our *New Creation*. This is marvelous! From before the beginning of time He made it possible for you and me to know Him, experience Him, be like Him, and be lavishly loved on by Him.

I hope you are beginning to understand how special you are and how privileged you are to be “*chosen*.” Consider the fact that since God sits outside of time, He knew everything about you, and all that you would say and do, and still He chose you. All those less than pleasant parts of your character and nature, all those little dark secrets in the corners of your heart, and all your struggles with sin, did not deter God in the least; He still found you absolutely adorable and wanted to spend eternity with you. Go figure! It is not something we deserve; it is just an outpouring of His love and mercy on our lives. As for me, I love knowing that I was chosen from before time; it makes me special, unique, and privileged beyond measure.

Every one of us should dwell on this truth and let God’s love for us expel all the awful and misplaced insecurities and self image issues that we have. Please, don’t let this go in one ear and out the other; don’t just give it the religious nod and then move on. Receive this truth into your heart and let it transform your mind so you can begin to live as one whose worth is beyond measure.

The lies that you have held to that perhaps were spoken to you by family members, friends, loved ones, or others who were scrambling around to find their place in this world, which said you were not worth a whole lot, that you deserved

to be treated in this way or that way, that you were not precious enough to be truly loved, safe, secure, cared for, and so on, have to be confronted with the truth of who you are to and who you are in Christ. Remember, you are amongst the select, the few, who can stand confidently on the fact that you are loved by a love that will not change and you have been loved this way from eternity past. You are amongst the “*chosen*.”

But let’s talk about this whole idea of election because 1) in some ways it seems to conflict with all that we have been taught about **our** having to choose Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, and 2) it seems to cut across the idea that God is “just.” Is it really fair that those who were not “chosen” must spend eternity separated from God in a very bad place?

Our Choice.

First, we are all very familiar with scriptures like **John 3:16** which says, “whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life,” or **John 1:12**, “But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God, or **Matthew 11:28-29**, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” In each of these passages there seems to be an element of volition, **our** choosing Him, **our** coming to Christ. But how does our needing to choose sync with His choosing of us before the foundations of the earth?

I have to say that there is an aspect of these truths that are far above and beyond our ability to truly understand since God is so much bigger than you and I. I will attempt however to articulate the ways the Bible presents this issue, but I do believe that we have to first take heed of this passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:8-9

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor 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.

So with that said; we need to first realize that time, as we know it, is finite and has a fixed beginning and end. Time was actually created by God; thus, He sits outside of time and is therefore able to see and know all things, from beginning to the end. It may be hard for us to comprehend, but to God all things are known and nothing is a surprise. If you think about it, even the fall in the Garden of Eden was known beforehand and was part of God's marvelous plan such that man would be the glory of God (which I will explain in Chapter 3). Therefore, He knows what is going to happen when He intervenes in time and space and comes to you and invites you to follow His Son. He knows who will follow and who will not because He chose some to follow.

Let's look at a key passage in Romans to help us unfold this mystery.

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these

whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

This might get a bit confusing, but please try and follow. Since God is outside of time and literally knows the beginning from the end, in His **foreknowledge**—in His ability to see everyone who would ever live—He chose or marked those upon whom He would have mercy. Then He intervened in time and space and ordered, or **predestined**, the events of this world to ensure that each person chosen to receive His mercy would get an introduction to Him. Then He actually **called**, them by name, to follow; and, since in His foreknowledge He had chosen them to receive mercy, they responded and made a volitional choice to follow.

Please, understand, God never forces anyone to follow, but He makes it possible for them to follow. By a pouring out of mercy on a person's life, which seems to have the effect of dampening, for a moment in time, the natural rebellion of their old sinful nature, they were free for the first time in their life to choose to follow and receive the love that had been freely offered to them.

And those who choose to follow He **justifies** by giving them His life and making them holy and blameless before Him when they by no means deserved it. And still there remains a promise of **glorification** for all those who follow Christ; a promise that we will one day receive new bodies that are entirely free from this flesh and the attachments to our old sinful nature.

So there is an element of volition, our free choice, but it is only because God chose us, predestined us, called us and has made a way for His mercy to be poured out on our lives. That's why Paul said: "Such confidence we have through

Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God” (**2 Corinthians 3:4-5**). Please, make no mistake, God is the one who works in each one He has chosen giving them even the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him (**Philippians 2:13**).

It’s just like choosing to walk in the Spirit of God—it’s a choice. God never forces anyone to walk in the Spirit; rather, He compels us to choose life; yet, He is the one who gives us the desire, the ability, and the power to choose to love Him. But we must always remember, the only reason we love Him is because He first loved us (**1 John 4:19**).

To following passages all speak to the principle that God gives us the desire and the power to follow Him: **Deuteronomy 29:4; 1 Kings 8:58; 2 Chronicles 30:12; Jeremiah 31:33, 32:40; Ezra 1:5, Isaiah 26:12; Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:27; Philippians 1:11; Hebrews 13:21; James 1:16-18**.

In summing up this first point, I think the best thing I can say about it is that in some strange way, which we cannot fully understand, both God’s unqualified election and our choice are emphatically and undeniably put forth within the scriptures—even though our choice is only made possible by a direct outpouring of His mercy on our life—and to teach choice without election or election without choice is not being honest or faithful to the Word.

A Matter of Justice.

Now let’s look at the justice of God’s choosing. To understand this issue we are going to have to move beyond what I would say is most people’s wrong belief about themselves and God. Most people, when they consider this issue, start with

the faulty presupposition that there is something innately good within them and it would be entirely unjust for them to be condemned to spend an eternity separated from God in abject suffering. But that is the root of the error. Despite all our protestations, we must know that there is nothing good within us; only God is good. Every one of us has sinned and rebelled, by nature and by choice, against the perfection of God; thus, none of us deserve the blessing or the pleasure of being with God forever. Consider what the Psalms say about our nature, as quoted by Paul in the book of Romans.

Romans 3:9-18

Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that **all** people, whether Jews or Gentiles, ***are under the power of sin.***

As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one. Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder. Destruction and misery always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all.”

Simply said, God is good and we are not! ***Jeremiah 17:9*** makes this so clear: “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.” So for a person to spend an eternity separated from God is not unjust because God did not create

the separation—the separation already exists within the heart of all of humanity—and He will not condemn anyone to eternity without Him because everyone already stands condemned.

Therefore, God choosing some to receive life is not a matter of “justice” at all but it is a matter of His “mercy” which, in His sovereignty as God, He has bestowed on those of us who come to Him through Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said that the Father did not send Him into the world to condemn it (for it already stands condemned) but to save those who trust Him. In fact, those who do not trust Him **have already** been judged for **not believing** in the only Son of God. Their judgment is based on this fact: the light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished (***John 3:17-21***).

Now since God is God, and you are not, He gets to decide upon whom He graciously and lavishly bestows His mercy. As He says: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (***Romans 9:15; Exodus 33:10***). So even though those whom He calls “sons” and “daughters” actually deserve to spend eternity separated from Him, He has made it possible for us to be holy and blameless before Him.

It is all a testament to His glorious mercy, for our having been chosen has nothing to do with our being good or somehow deserving it more than others. It’s just His mercy, a decision He as God made; and I for one thank God that He has made me a vessel of His mercy and gave me what I do not deserve.

Ephesians 1:5

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. (ESV)

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (NLT)

I wanted to read this in both the ESV and the NLT because they both capture the concepts here a little differently. First of all, I want you to understand that this notion of adoption is not what we think where someone from another family is adopted and brought into a new family. That is more of our western custom. But beginning with the Greeks and more pronounced in Roman culture, adoption was more of a coming of age concept where a legitimate son is inducted into manhood and is presented publically in a formal celebration. With this rite the son receives the legal right to inherit all and everything that is owned by the Father. Further, it is at that time that the Father and other public officials would gather in the Forum or some other common gathering place and drape the son with his white toga—the symbol of Roman citizenship and the so called beginning of his adult life.

I want you to note that although he did not receive the right to his inheritance until the coming of age, the son was always part of the family. And it was always the Father's plan to have this coming of age celebration where the son would receive everything that belongs to him. And since we were chosen before time, since we have always belonged to God, He made sure (He predestined) that we

made it to our coming of age celebration where Jesus clothed us in white (made us pure and blameless) and we were publically presented by the Father to all of creation as a glorious spectacle for all to behold.

When we chose to accompany our Father to the “Forum” (chose to accept our white toga that was waiting for us), our sonship was manifested before all of creation and that was the beginning of our real life, our real citizenship among those belonging to heaven (*Philippians 3:20*). And what an inheritance we have received. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ—this means that all that belongs to Jesus belongs to us. It is not divided in any way shape or form, but we have 100% rights to the entire inheritance (*Romans 8:17; Titus 3:7*).

Now what amazes me is that our adoption was not only part of His will, it also gave Him great **pleasure**—it’s what He wanted to do. The ESV says it was the “purpose of his will” and the NASB says, “kind intention of His will” but the Greek is emphatically clear, it means the “pleasure” or “delight” of His will. I love this aspect of God. He brought us into relationship with Him because we give Him delight. I believe this notion is captured not only in the image of a proud Father who gets to present his son to the public, but in the delight and utter pleasure that a wife can bring to her husband. I know this changes the metaphor we have been working with, but still let’s consider the way Solomon was utterly delighted by his woman and remember this is how Jesus is delighted by us.

Song of Songs 1:10-11

"Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments, Your neck with strings of beads." "We will make for you ornaments of gold with beads of silver."

To him she is so beautiful that he wanted to lavish her with beautiful things that accentuated her loveliness—no expense spared—gold, silver, she is worth it.

Song of Songs 2:14; 4:7,10-15; 5:1; 7:2, 6

Let me see you; let me hear your voice. For your voice is pleasant, and you are lovely. You are altogether beautiful, my darling, beautiful in every way. Your love **delights** me, my treasure, my bride. Your love is **better** than wine, your perfume **more fragrant** than spices. Your lips are **as sweet** as nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. Your clothes are **scented** like the cedars of Lebanon.

You are my private garden, my treasure, my bride, a secluded spring, a hidden fountain. Your thighs shelter a paradise of pomegranates with rare spices—henna with nard, nard and saffron, fragrant calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh, and aloes, and every other lovely spice. You are a garden fountain, a well of fresh water streaming down from Lebanon's mountains.

I have entered my garden, my treasure, my bride! I gather myrrh with my spices and eat honeycomb with my honey. I drink wine with my milk. Your navel is as delicious as a goblet filled with wine. ***Oh how delightful you are my beloved; how pleasant for utter delight!***

Every description this man uses to describe his woman is about pure utter delight and pleasure—pleasure to the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the tongue, and the touch. It is all so sensual and so intoxicating. This is God’s attempt to describe for us in words and pictures the sheer pleasure that He received to work out His will so that you and I could be His garden of delight in which He dwells and in which He feasts and thoroughly enjoys.

I believe that this whole notion of God and pleasure is something that the enemy has stolen from our understanding of His nature. When we think of God too many of us still react in fear and tend to think of some gray haired old man that is more than just a little grumpy. But think about it. There are so many things, which we tend to take for granted, that God did just to give us delight. He paints the sky with clouds and light and creates amazing colors so we will just stare and take delight. He created dogs with such a unique nature that they just naturally make us smile and feel comforted. He made food and drink so pleasurable to us. He made man for woman and woman for man so that we might know and experience joy, love, intimacy and pleasure. I want you to understand, God is not some killjoy who is just about pain and suffering, but He is about pure delight—a delight that can only truly be experienced in Him and with Him. He loves delight and He loves to give delight. That is why He says that in His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (***Psalm 16:11***).

I hope that as you begin to understand God’s heart and affection for you it will help you throw away, like filthy idols, all the wrong belief you have about God and His intentions for your life. Too many of us still do not live as if God is over the

edge passionate and desirous of us. And what is even crazier is when you consider that His desire is that we become like Him. How glorious is that?

Going back to the passage in **Romans 8**, He predestined us with a very specific purpose, to be conformed into the image of His Son. So when we are adopted into our sonship, He gives us the *New Creation* (our white toga), which has been created in His image and then, by His Spirit, He teaches us why and how to trust our lives to Him so that we can live from the *New Creation* and experience His pleasure. You see our Father wants us to no longer live as citizens of this world but as citizens of our true home in heaven, fulfilling the will of God for our lives—that which is good, acceptable, and perfect (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Ephesians 1:5-8

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

This phrase “to the praise and glory of His grace” is really just Paul’s way of saying that when we think about how God chose us and predestined us to be His own, just for His pleasure, we should break out in praise. His grace poured out on our lives is unbelievable. Instead of these truths inciting any opposition to God with wrongful complaints of justice and fairness, they are intended to cause us to

bow our knees and say thank you for loving me. We deserved no love but still we have it because He freely gave it.

Imagine, without the outpouring of God's wonderful mercy, all of us would reject Him—we would! In fact, **Romans 2** says we are so dark and void of light that we would not even thank God for sending the rain that grows our crops (and we have seen that to be true with the way so many tend to ascribe all of God's basic goodness to us to mother nature, evolution, or some other ridiculous humanistic fallacy. So praise Jesus for His wonderful grace.

In the Greek, this phrase “which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” literally says, “He has accepted us in the Beloved.” Accepted is in the Aorist active tense meaning it was done way back when and every moment of every day we are still accepted. “In the Beloved” is just another way for Paul to say that our acceptance is in Christ for He is the one who is perfectly loved by God.

I want us to focus for a moment on this word redemption. “In Him we have redemption, through His blood.” Redemption literally means to pay a ransom in full. If we could sum up the Bible in one word, perhaps redemption is the word. Just about every story in the Bible, and even whole books like Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Acts, and Revelation, paint a picture of God working to bring redemption to those who were sold as slaves to the enemy. It does not matter where in the Bible you turn you will soon run across God's wonderful plan of redemption.

Now the reason this is such an important topic is because of how much it cost God. Sure God could have easily wiped out all of creation and created a new world with new people and start all over again hoping this time they don't blow it. But instead He chose to pay the ultimate price in order to make clean those who

were soiled, to set free those who were enslaved, to give life to those who were dead. The price, however, was not paid with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (**1 Peter 1:18-20**). The Father gave up His only Son to be killed so that you and I might be redeemed to Him. What a price to pay just so all of us who once hated God could actually enjoy His love. Look at this passage in Song of Songs which captures these truths.

Song of Songs 1:5-6

I am very dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!

She says do not look on me because I am dark, or literally black because of the sun. This implies that she was exposed, without protection, to the harsh judgment of the sun. And although she believed she had value, others would not think so. This is a picture of this woman's bondage to sin and the affect of living without any shelter or protection. She had been abandoned by her own family into slavery. She had to work to make others ok—to serve their will—but she was never allowed to take care of herself. She was alone, empty, and without love.

Why do you think she says the children of her mother but not her father? It's because they were sons of a different father. Eve is our common mother, or in this case maybe it's a reference to Israel, but Satan is the father of the ungodly

whereas God is the father of the righteous. She was left with the sons of those who belong to Satan and they took advantage of her.

This is a perfect picture of our bondage to sin and to Satan before we were redeemed. Satan had his way with us and we were burned by the sun enslaved to his pleasures and his will. But God, in lavishing His grace upon us, woke us up to His love and placed within us a desire to want Him and to find His place of shelter and protection. Notice that she believed she was beautiful; it's as if God's mercy had already been poured on her and her love was aroused and she just needed to find the way. So she asks:

Song of Songs 1:7

Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who veils herself beside the flocks of your companions?

She no longer wants to live out in the open exposed to the sun. She no longer wants to be a slave. She wants to go to the good pasture and lie down and rest. She no longer wants to be treated as an untouchable, literally a prostitute, who can only come beside those who belong to God but can never be in relationship with Him or His companions. She wants to fall under the good shepherd's care.

In the text, we are not really sure who gives the reply to this woman, but based on the way she is addressed (and the verse that follows which we will not be covering) it is probably her lover.

Song of Songs 1:8

If you don't know, O most beautiful woman, follow the trail of my flock, and graze your young goats by the shepherds' tents.

He reaffirms his adorations and despite the wear and tear on her skin He calls her not just beautiful, but most beautiful. He tells her to follow the path that others have walked. In other words, go to my tent, the path is clearly marked, and you can rest and feed and find your shelter and protection because you are loved.

The way to the Father has been marked by the blood of Jesus. Others have trod that path and if anyone chooses to take the same path they will find rest and protection in His tents and will be redeemed from the slavery of serving in the vineyards of Satan.

And what is amazing, going back to Ephesians, is that this redemption brings to us the forgiveness of sins, which by the way in this passage is not a verb but a noun. In other words, forgiveness is not something that is ongoing or that we continually need, but something that was done; it's something we have. It is now a reality; we have forgiveness as a result of the lavish unrestrained outpouring of His grace. It is our state of existence; thus, even if we choose at times to live in our old sinful nature, we are still forgiven. It's what we are and that does not change!

Again, these truths should not cause you to return to the vineyards and once again live as a slave; that would be so foolish when you can be free. These truths should cause you to bust out in praise to Jesus for: you belong to Him, you are His son, you have been clothed in white robes that have been dipped in the blood of

Christ, you have been presented before all of creation, and you have received your inheritance. All of this is yours merely because you are beautiful to Him and in His mercy He chose to pour out and lavish His grace upon you who were once dark and burned by the sun. You have been set free to live free—to live in your new life in Christ. Come to His tent and you will find rest. Abide in His tent and you will be able to find protection from the sun, food upon which to feast, and a place to rest your head. Come to Him.

Let's Pray