Ephesians 1:3-14 Chosen By God

If you reach that great day when the balance on your mortgage equals a big, beautiful ZERO, are you going to ring your hands, worrying about everyone still paying theirs? Does paying off your car leave you lost in guilt for everyone else’s debts? Would you pay cash for a giant ultra HD TV, then hang your head in shame for all the other shoppers drooling over your purchase? Strangely, we receive these gifts of God with thanks, praise, and excitement. But when it comes to the Biblical gift of election (or predestination) we can’t stop asking about the other guy. “Pastor, what about everyone else?”

This is one of those rare times when God wants you to stop thinking about everyone else and focus on your personal relationship with God. In the opening verse of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul gives us our first “God’s eye view.” He opens the heart of God and reveals his most personal feelings for each one of you.

He says this, **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. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.** **In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”**

I think because the doctrine of election raises questions for which we are not given answers, we sometimes shy away from talking about it. But that’s really unfortunate. Because look at what Paul does: he didn’t think that this topic was only for seminary-trained pastors behind closed doors. No, he jumps right into it at the beginning of his letter to the Ephesians because Paul knows this teaching is an incredible blessing for us, and that’s how he starts out. ***“Praise be to God …who has blessed us.”***

Has anyone ever told you to count your blessings? People usually say that when they think you’re not appreciating everything you have. Paul tells you to do the same thing this morning for about the same reason. He wants you to praise God for all the blessings he’s given you. So, I actually want to practice that. Take 10 seconds and think of 3 blessings you have today. Go.

Are they good? I’m sure they are. Things like your house, your family, friends, a job, maybe a new car…the list goes on. But how many of the blessings you thought of are spiritual? It’s very easy to remember those physical, tangible blessings God puts right in front of us. But how many of your blessings were spiritual? How often do you thank God for your spiritual blessings? Things like faith, comfort, peace, the ability to show love and forgiveness toward one another?

I’m willing to guess that it’s not even close to as often as we thank God for our physical blessings. But you have to be careful there. See, if what we pay attention to the most in our lives are the physical blessings, we’re falling right into the devil’s trap. Satan wants you to look at your physical blessings to define how significant you are to God. In other words, if God gives you enough stuff, he really loves you. If he gives you enough health, then he really loves you. If he keeps your family safe and you can hold onto them for as long as you want, then he really loves you. And if he doesn’t, well then he must not love you.

Don’t believe that lie. God defines your significance by the spiritual blessings he gives you because he knows they are most valuable. We know that too. God gives us certain times in our lives which remind us of that. Take for example: how often do you hear someone on their deathbed saying they wish they had spent more time shopping for houses or at the car dealership? You don’t. You very often, however, hear them say they regret not being a better parent, a more forgiving spouse, a more caring friend, and a more godly person, which are all spiritual gifts God gives you.

And you’ll notice, Paul doesn’t say, “If you pray really hard or go to church often enough, or if you can speak in tongues or can translate tounges, then God will bless you with the gift of the spirit.” No. Paul writes, ***“Praise be to God … [because he] has[already] blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”*** You already have every spiritual gift. God has already given you the best of what he has because God has chosen you.

Paul says he **chose [you] in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.**

This passage, when you really think about it, is amazing: Before God created water and oxygen. Before he made flowers and trees. Even before he created light, God thought about the people he would make and knew they would do a face-plant into sin.

Adam and Eve and every single one of us should have to spend an eternity in hell for this mess we’ve created. But God didn’t want that. So he planned to send his Son to save sinners. Not only that, God also chose those who would come to believe in Jesus and therefore one day spend eternity with him in heaven. This is election. But if you’re worried that doesn’t include you, then you are not looking at you like God looks at you.

Allow me to illustrate for a moment: I have a $100 bill here. How many of you would like this $100 bill? What if I crumple it up and make it all wrinkley? Now how many of you would like this $100 bill? But what if I throw it on the ground and step on it and rub it into the stage? Now how many of you would like this $100 bill? Why? Because through all that crumpling and stomping, it’s value didn’t change. It remains valuable.

God has chosen you because you remain valuable to him. Just as our government has assigned the value of $100 to this wrinkley bill, God has assigned the value of his own perfect Son to you. When God looks at you through the eyes of your faith, he doesn’t see the sinful wrinkles of your disobedient life, he doesn’t see the wrinkling gossip you fall into, he doesn’t see the dust and the dirt from lust in your heart, he doesn’t see the small tears of doubt and faithlessness, he sees the full value of his Son’s obedient life. And he sees it in you. He has chosen you because you are worth as much to him as his only perfect Son.

And he did all this, before you knew him, before you met him, before you stepped foot in this church or gave one offering to him, before you did anything good for him, and knowing all the bad things you would do to him, God chose you.

And if you’re still wondering “How do I know whether or not I’m among the chosen?” consider Paul’s answer. Note how Paul did not say that God chose the elect BECAUSE they were holy and blameless. No. He chose the elect TO BE holy and blameless. And that’s exactly what God has declared us to be ***“in Christ.”***

In the early stages when the Golden Gate bridge in SF was being built, many of the workers died by falling off the bridge while working on it. This, of course, made the other workers very afraid. They worked slower to be safer. Obviously, this was a hindrance to getting the job done. So the company in charge of construction decided to spend some money. They invested $100,000 in a massive net that would save people if they fell. And it worked. Fewer workers died, moral went up, there were fewer accidents, and people worked more confidently, quickly and safely.

God has invested so much more than 100 grand in securing your eternal safety. He invested the life of his Son. He did so as an investment that would guaranty your safety forever; even if the devil himself tries to throw you off the bridge or this dark world tries to make you jump with it; you are safe. God has promised you that your eternity is predestined.

But it all only happens in one way. And Paul is very clear about that way, that these blessings are only all available **in Christ.** In verse 3, ***“he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ****.*” Verse 4, ***“he chose us in him****,”* in Christ. Verse 5, ***“he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.”***

Friends the key to knowing whether or not you are one of the elect is to ask yourself this simple question. “Am I ***in Jesus***? In other words: do I recognize what a piece of dirt sinner I am, completely unable to save myself. Do I repent of my sins and strive to live a new life, throwing myself at his mercy? And then do I believe that Jesus has cleansed me of all my sins with his blood on the cross…every single one of them simply because his grace?” If you say yes to all those questions, then you must be one of the elect because there is no way you would entrust yourself to Jesus unless God first had chosen you to do so.

And there’s one more sign. Paul says in our text, that the elect have also received the Holy Spirit as a deposit to assure that you are one of the elect. Paul says: ***“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance…”***

As many of you know, we are about a month out from the college football season. Maybe some of you are planning a trip to Neiland stadium in Knoxville, maybe of you don’t care. But if you do want to go to a game, what do you need? You need a ticket right? Proof that you paid the entrance fee. That ticket is a guarantee that when you get to the gates, they’ll let you in.

Well, the Holy Spirit is the “ticket,” the “seal” that God has given to assure us that when we get to the gates of heaven, we’ll gain entrance. And although we can’t see the Holy Spirit like we can see a ticket, God says that we received him at our baptism. So when you’re wondering whether or not you’re one of the elect, the best place to look for confirmation? Your baptism!

That isn’t to say of course that all who are baptized automatically go to heaven. If someone gives me a ticket to the UT – Florida game this fall, but I carelessly toss it aside because I think it will be easier for me to talk my way into the game, I will only have myself to blame when I’m left sitting outside because I was refused entrance for not having a ticket. In the same way, you can’t talk your way or work your way into heaven, you can only get there with the Holy Spirit and with Jesus.

God chose us in eternity to be his children. He made that choice known in time when he brought us to faith in Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit. Friends, all these things are wonderful proof and assurance God has given you that you’re going to be in heaven someday.

So I guess that really only leaves one question this morning: Why?

Why did God choose us? Did he choose us because he saw that we were so much more deserving, because we would be so much more fun to have in heave? If your answer is yes to that question, friends you don’t recognize your sinful condition.

Listen again to Paul’s words from our text: ***“In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us.”***

God chose us not because we deserved it. He chose us, ***“In love.”*** In other words, there is nothing we can do to earn salvation—it totally depends on God. And I’m glad it does! If it depended on me in any way, I’d spend a lifetime worrying about whether or not I had done what I needed to do to make it to heaven.

And that friends is why we praise God for election….it’s a promise assuring us that our eternal future is firmly in his hands!

But it’s not just the future, it’s also the present. That’s even true if you’re undergoing difficulty.

If you didn’t know any better, you might have guessed that Paul was writing these words from a sunny outdoor beach cafe while on vacation! “***Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.”*** Sounds like he’s really in a good place right?

Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this, waiting to hear whether or not Caesar would condemn him to death. I doubt Paul enjoyed being in prison, but it wasn’t the end of the world for him. As one of God’s elect, he knew that God would use that imprisonment for Paul’s own good and for the good of others. And that’s why he could start off his letter to the Ephesians with those words of praise for his God.

Likewise you can start off every week, every day, every conversation with such words of praise, even if your health is acting up, your marriage isn’t what it once was, or your job security isn’t looking so great. Your health will fail, your marriage won’t be perfect, and you may lose your job, but one thing Satan can never take by force from you is your salvation. That is firmly in God’s hand.

The doctrine of election is always in a context of comfort in the Bible. If still you feel uneasy about it, set it on the shelf and focus on what Christ has done for you. He is the most significant person in your life. Which means that everything you do should be focused on him, his teachings, his living, his example, and his love.

But to God, his focus is different. Because God’s focus is on you. Before the creation of the world it was on you. He has blessed you. He has chosen you. He has predestined you because he can’t wait to be with you.

That’s God’s view of you. Amen.