

CHOSEN IN CHRIST (Ephesians 1:3-6)

Ephesians 1:3-6

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.

1/Chosen in Christ

- See also 1:11,12
- ‘Choose’ = ‘call out’ (the word *ekklesia* derives from this)
- Predestine = *pro-horizo*. The idea of setting boundaries (horizons) within which we live
- Good pleasure = what pleases God
- Will = his choice

This is a controversial subject. People get upset over the idea of predestination. Too often we think of God arbitrarily sending people to heaven or to hell.

2/The ancient debate

John Calvin (1509-1564). Strongly believed in predestination. Reformed Church and Prebyterians took this stance. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609). Strongly believed in the power of free will. Methodists and Pentecostals took this stance

Many questions are raised...

- How can God be fair if he only chooses some?
- How can God’s sovereignty and human free will both be true?
- Why are some delivered while others are not?

Eg the question of healing—

- Not enough faith? See Matt 8:10-13; 9:22; 15:28
- Not the will of God? See Hebrews 11:32-40
- At times, both seem to be true. See B.Chant, *Walking with a Limp*, .

3/Foundational concepts

- Human sinfulness—because all are sinners, all will die unless rescued by God. No one deserves to be chosen (Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Cor 1:26-29)
- Divine sovereignty—God is sovereign and can do whatever he pleases (Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 46:10,11). No human being can make such statements
- Divine mercy—God in his mercy chooses us to live for his glory (Rom 11:31-32)
- Divine infinity—because God is eternal and infinite he is above and beyond time (Psalm 90:2; Eph 1:4).
- Foreknowledge = all knowledge. What may be future to us is present to him

It is like two people on either side of a wall. We can’t see the person on the other side, but God can see us both. Similarly, we can’t see someone in another time, but God can.

4/Chosen in Christ

- Like every other blessing, predestination is only through Christ
- Because Christ is God's Chosen One, we, too, are chosen in him.

5/The reason for being predestined

It is appropriate for theologians to wrestle with these questions. For most of us, however, it is more helpful to ask, 'Why has God called us? What is his intention for us? Why does he tell us this?'

Frodo in *Lord of the Rings* asks, 'Why was I chosen?' Gandalf replies, 'Such questions cannot be answered. You may be sure that it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom at any rate. But you have been chosen and you must therefore use such strength and heart and wits as you have.'

When we take the Word by faith, we see that knowing that we are predestined has two great values for us—

6/Holiness (4)

Holy = separated from the world and to God (Ex 28:36; 1 Peter 2:9). 'The connection between election and holiness is very remarkable. They always go together in Scripture. One can scarcely recollect a passage which speaks of election that does not also speak of holiness.' (Milner, *Logos Commentary*, 3:42)

- To be blameless (4). Blameless = without fault. A requirement of leadership (1 Tim 3:2) and a requirement for all Christians (Phil 1:10; 2:15; 1 Thess 3:13; 1 Tim 3:10)
- Not 'not able to sin' but 'able not to sin.'
- 'Be perfect' (Matt 5:48)
- To be conformed to Christ. Romans 8:28-30
- To develop Christian character. Col 3:12-14
- To suffer. Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 1:8 eg Tevye's prayer in *Fiddler on the Roof*: 'Couldn't you choose someone else once in a while?'
- To be obedient. 1 Peter 1:2

It is clear that predestination is not just about getting a free ticket to heaven (or hell). It is about being called to live a holy and blameless life for the glory of God. Less people might object if they realised this!

8/ Assurance

- Ultimately even where we don't understand, one thing stands out: If God has called and chosen us, we are safe and secure forever. There is nothing to fear. No one can thwart his purpose. See John 10:27-29; 1 Thess 5:23-24
- Even if things do go wrong, God has a way of turning them around to victory! At the end of the day we know that in everything God works for God with those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).
- Grace = God's undeserved favour to us.

- We can rejoice in this without fear.
- We are secure in God's love and grace in Christ.

The challenge

- People have wrestled with these questions for centuries.
- Sometimes it is helpful to be a Calvinist; sometimes it is helpful to be an Arminian
- Eg the Arminian approach helps us to become a Christian; the Calvinist approach helps us to stay one. In God's economy, both may be true

Courtship and marriage is a pale reflection of predestination. In my case, I thought I was making all the moves when courting my wife, but looking back now I can see that she had a prior strategy of her own. Vanessa chose me before the creation of our world to be loving and devoted in her sight. In love she 'predestined' me to be adopted as her husband in accordance with her good pleasure and will...

Let's respond joyfully to God's call and to live lives well-pleasing to him. As we trust him, no matter what happens, we know his purpose will be fulfilled in our lives forever!

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Read: Ephesians 1:3-6

1. According to this passage, God has chosen us to be both holy and blameless. The word 'holy' means 'separate' or 'sanctified'. In OT days, a man or woman could take 'the vow of a Nazirite' which meant being 'holy to the Lord.' Read Numbers 1-6 to see what this entailed. What would be the Christian equivalents of the Nazirite vows? (You will need to use your imagination here.)
2. Consider the word 'blameless'. Using a concordance, try to find out what this word means by seeing how it is used in other passages.
3. Remember that God chose us to be holy and blameless. How do we become holy? You will find the answers in passages like John 17:17; 1 Cor 6:11, 19, 20; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Heb 10:10; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2. Discuss the process by which sanctification takes place.
4. Some people think holiness means qualities like not drinking or smoking; others think it means being quiet and placid in life; others think it means being a priest or pastor. In the light of the Scriptures quoted above, what does holiness mean to you?
5. What do you think it means to be adopted (5)? What differences are there between being adopted and being born into a family?
6. Imagine you are an orphan and someone adopts you. List some of the benefits you would receive. Relate these to the benefits of being adopted in God's family.
7. In v. 6, Paul describes God's calling as being 'to the praise of the glory of his grace' (lit. translation). Why is God's calling an act of grace? And why does he talk of the glory of God's grace? What do you think is this glory?

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