

EPHESIANS – part 2;

Predestination and Election According to Paul

Please turn in your bibles to Ephesians chapter one.

Good morning, I hope everyone has been reading and re-reading the book of Ephesians during the week. If you have, then you should have a pretty good handle on what Paul is saying.

Last week we began our study in the book of Ephesians and we talked about some of the basic historical context and structure of the book. From there we went into Paul's apocalypse – his revelation and what that means to us. Hopefully you remember that the main theme of the book is one of unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul stressed this point. We saw that he also made a distinction, at least at the beginning of the letter between "us" and "y'all", with "us" being Israel and "y'all" being the new Gentile converts. This is so important as we go through the letter because that affects how we read the rest of what Paul wrote. If we don't recognize this, then we fall into the same trap many others have over the centuries.

We will concentrate on the opening poem of the letter, that is verses 3- 14, for now. There is a great deal of "religious" wording in this section as Paul lays the foundational bedrock for what he is stating – his revelation of God's plan from the beginning, which translates to the Gospel. As we read through this section, we will run across some wording that has divided the church ever since the Reformation, if not before. That is what we will get into today.

Eph. 1:3 ^eBlessed be ^fthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ^gin the heavenly places, ⁴ ^heven as he ⁱchose us in him ^jbefore the foundation of the world, that we should be ^kholy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ ^lhe predestined us² for ^madoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, ⁿaccording to the purpose of his will, ⁶ ^oto the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in ^pthe Beloved. ⁷ ^qIn him we have ^rredemption ^sthrough his blood, ^tthe forgiveness of our trespasses, ^uaccording to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ ^vmaking known³ to us the mystery of his will, ⁿaccording to his purpose, which he ^wset forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for ^xthe fullness of time, ^yto unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Eph. 1:11 In him we have obtained ^zan inheritance, ^ahaving been predestined ^baccording to the purpose of him who works all things according to ^cthe counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be ^dto the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also,

when you heard ^ethe word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, ^fwere sealed with the ^gpromised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is ^hthe guarantee⁴ of our ⁱinheritance until ^jwe acquire ^kpossession of it, ⁵ ^lto the praise of his glory.

What we read in this section is how the Gentiles have been blessed by God, in Christ as the Jewish believers have. That then trickles down to us.

We/ they have been/ are blessed in that:

- Election/ choseness
- Adoption as God's children
- Grace
- Redemption
- Forgiveness of sins
- Knowledge of God's secret purpose
- Hope of a future inheritance
- Presence of God's Spirit

These are all important issues and we will tackle them as we go, but first, we need to deal with what is meant by election and predestination. This issue has divided the church for centuries. Is Paul advocating for what has come to be known as Calvinism? Has God determined from before the beginning who will be saved and who won't? What we are going to do today is let Paul define those things for us rather than some of the Reformers from a few hundred years ago. Remember, it is about the context and what was meant by the original author and the hearers, not what has been taught since Protestants broke free from the Catholic Church. Therefore, let's let Paul define what is meant here and see if this doesn't clear up things for us.

If we are going to let Paul define these terms, then we need to know what his source is. What do you think that might be? Well, of course, it is the OT. We need to understand that words mean nothing without context. People mean things when they speak words. Words are moldable.

What do you think of, or what do you think is meant when you read or hear these words, **“Take him out!”**

Well, if you own a pet, you might have thought of taking out the dog or cat. If you have been watching something on the mafia, you might think of someone getting whacked. Or, if you were thinking of sports, you might have thought of something like this:

SLIDE/ PICTURE

If you have been reading Ephesians through the lens of the “you” or “y’all” is me, or Christians in general, then many will think of the idea of predestination and election differently than what Paul meant. If you have been taught, as most of us have, that the gospel is something like this:

GOD ----- me(we) sin ----- CROSS ----- Heaven or Hell

then Paul’s use of these terms probably either fall into the Calvinist idea of salvation or, if you’re not a Calvinist, then they still relate to individual salvation, but can also be uncomfortable, no matter how good of a handle you think you have on the subject. But as we have just seen with the “Take him out!” example, context and the meaning of the author are key to understanding what was intended, no matter how well we think we have built our doctrinal base. Therefore, this is one way of looking at predestination/ election. But is that what Paul was saying? If not, then how do we determine what he meant? How do we define the terms as Paul intended to be defined?

What was Paul’s source for his doctrine and beliefs? It was, of course, the OT. And where do we go to pull on this thread? As usual, we go back to the beginning. We will let the story of the bible determine our doctrine.

In the beginning, the story, once creation is completed, turns to Adam and Eve. Adam also literally means, “human,” whereas Eve means, “life.”

Adam = human Eve = life

We will just refer to them as humanity. That is where the story begins. We are aware of all the failures that occur throughout the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Then we get to this character who is “randomly” thrust onto the stage. His name is Abram/ Abraham.

Let’s look back at Ephesians 1:3 for a second.

Eph. 1:3 ^eBlessed be ^fthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ^gin the heavenly places,

Now, in our modern thinking, “spiritual” often means “non-physical.” This is so wrong. It means of or through Spirit. We are blessed by/ through the Spirit. Can we think of humans and blessing going back into the Torah?

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, ^o“Let us make man^s in our image, ^pafter our likeness. And ^qlet them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

**Gen. 1:27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
^rmale and female he created them.**

Gen. 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, ^s“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God blessed them, (Adam and Eve) but by extension, humanity in the Dominion Mandate. Paul picks up this story in chapter 2, where he puts the Gentile believers, “you” into the boat with all who were separated from God.

Adam and Eve were tasked with filling the earth. But with what was the earth filled by the time we get to Genesis 6:11? It was filled with blood and violence. In Genesis three, at the fall, God essentially handed mankind over to their own devices. They wanted to decide right and wrong on their own terms, so God let them. God has a way of doing that and then coming back and asking, “How is that working for you?” All of this culminates in the story of the Tower of Babel incident where instead of spreading and filling the earth, mankind attempts to centralize things building a tower and a city. (Gen. 11:4)

God’s response is to scatter mankind. This is a curse or discipline on one hand, but a blessing on the other because as we pick up the story, a guy named Abram comes from a union of this scattering. We see him in chapter 12.

Gen. 12:1 Now ^mthe LORD said¹ to Abram, “Go from your country² and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² ⁿAnd I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ ^oI will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and ^pin you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

What eventually happens? We begin with one man, which leads to a family, an extended family and then one nation. We that God CHOSE one man out of all humanity. This is the beginning of what Paul means by election – namely that God chooses one out of many in order to then bless everyone. If we don’t begin here, then we can quickly think that “election” and predestination means that God chose me, personally, to go to Heaven or Hell. When Paul’s words are inserted into this template, it is easy to miss or hijack Paul’s intentions.

Do you remember the “us” and “y’all” we talked about last week? This is key because it reframes Paul’s usage of the terms, election and predestination. By using the lens of the Calvinist Reformers, it is easy come to idea of personal election, “me” and being predestined to Heaven or Hell. And some deep, convoluted arguments and theology have based out of this. But remember, the Reformers were dealing with and mainly countering the Catholic church’s ideas of salvation. They weren’t dealing with the original context. But if we use Paul’s lens of “us” = Israel, and “y’all” = Gentiles, then the idea of just who was elected moves to Israel as a nation, (collectively) and not us as individuals. Is this consistent with the biblical story and Paul’s usage of these terms? I believe it is. Paul is using the OT and the story of the entire bible, God’s plan from the beginning to define these terms. The logic of the biblical story is that God chooses one in order to bless or bring blessing to the many. Let’s go back to the beginning.

The story begins with Adam and Eve, (humanity), works its way through chapter 11 of Genesis and then the main character in the story becomes Abraham. It goes from Abraham to Israel, as a nation. But we know that just as Adam and Eve failed, Israel did also. They do no better than what happened in the first 11 chapters. The vehicle of blessing, in this case, Israel, has become enmeshed with the problem. We can see the cycle. And the only way to end that cycle is to have the vehicle of blessing be someone other than a mere human. The problem is the humanity of the human. Therefore, we see the emphasis of the biblical story change from Israel as the vehicle of blessing to the Messiah – an anointed king from the line of David. He is anticipated throughout the psalms. Ezekiel and Isaiah call this Messiah, David some 500 years after his death. The short branch, (aetz) from the line of Jesse will be the one to restore the nations, (not nation singular) which was the plan from the beginning.

Following the logic, in Genesis 12:3, God says to Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” This shows that Abraham is/ was the initial vehicle of blessing, but as we go through the bible, as time passes and we see the failure of Israel, the extended family of Abraham to be the vehicle of blessing, we then see the prophets move that focus from Israel as a nation, to an individual – Messiah. Once again, we see one chosen to bless the many.

**Psa. 72:1 Give the king your 'justice, O God,
 and your righteousness to the royal son!**

**2 May he 'judge your people with righteousness,
 and your poor with justice!**

**3 Let the mountains bear 'prosperity for the people,
 and the hills, in righteousness!**

**4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
 give deliverance to the children of the needy,
 and crush the oppressor!**

**17 'May his name endure forever,
 his fame continue as long as the sun!
 'sMay people be blessed in him,
 'all nations call him blessed!**

This is in anticipation of a king – thinking forward in time, not backwards or even to the present of David's day. In verse 17 we have the “name” referenced, which was something promised to Abraham, as well as the many peoples being blessed, and “all nations call him blessed.” Now, remember all the “blessing” language back in Ephesians one? Now the Messiah, will be the one who moves Israel's story forward and also sets all of humanities story back on track.

God began by blessing all humanity, but they forfeited it. All that hope then went to one chosen family to be the vehicle of blessing – they forfeited it. The hope to fix all of us then moved to ONE individual ruler, the Messiah, Jesus, in whom all the nations will discover blessing. In Messiah, Jesus, God solved both problems – Israel's, as well as the rest of humanity's issues in

one fell swoop. Now, both Israel and the nations can receive blessing and be “united.” Sound familiar? This is Paul’s point and theme of the letter. If we go back to Ephesians 1:3-14,

Eph. 1:3 ^eBlessed be ^fthe God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ^gin the heavenly places,

We are blessed in whom? In Jesus, the Messiah. This is the story in Paul’s head when he uses terminology such as election and predestination. These words, along with others are related to the ultimate story of the bible. Can I prove that? What is the source for Paul’s language here, “choosing”? What does Paul mean when he says, “He CHOSE us IN the Messiah?”

Does Paul use this terminology elsewhere in his writings? Yes, he does, but only in one place do these words and concepts all come together, and that is in the book of Romans. Now we have moved from the OT to the NT.

Rom. 9:1 ^aI am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For ^bI could wish that I myself were ^caccursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, ¹ my kinsmen ^daccording to the flesh. ⁴ They are ^eIsraelites, and to them belong ^fthe adoption, ^gthe glory, ^hthe covenants, ⁱthe giving of the law, ^jthe worship, and ^kthe promises. ⁵ To them belong ^lthe patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, ^mwho is God over all, ⁿblessed forever. Amen.

¹¹ 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 ^thim who calls—

The point here is that election language is Israel language, God choosing Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before they were born. Also, note the “blessed”. The choosing is the election.

Rom. 11:1 I ask, then, ^hhas God rejected his people? By no means! For ⁱI myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, ¹a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²^jGod has not rejected his people whom he ^kforeknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?

Foreknowledge – whom was it that God foreknew? Once again, the only time Paul uses these terms he is speaking of Israel. They are the elect and the chosen, the foreknown. This is a corporate thing, not an individual one. The only other time Paul uses this language, these terms, he is speaking specifically of Israel. Where did Paul get this vocabulary and its usage? From the OT. The election and choosing of Israel is one of the main themes of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 4:37

And because ^fhe loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them³ and brought you out of Egypt ^gwith his own presence, by his great power,

Deut. 7:6 “For ^pyou are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be ^aa people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ 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, ⁸ but ^qit is because the LORD loves you and is keeping ^rthe oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Once again, they failed. Once you get into the psalms and prophets, the emphasis moves from Israel to the Messiah. And once you get to the NT, the emphasis changes from Israel as the object to be blessed to an international family, the new Israel, as Paul says, which includes the people of the nation of Israel.

We have talked about the elect. Now, let’s look at who is predestined.

Psa. 89:19 “Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one,³ and said:
“I have ^vgranted help to one who is ^wmighty;
I have exalted one ^xchosen from the people.

This is a messianic psalm. Remember, the vehicle of blessing is shifting from Israel as a nation, (corporately chosen) to the Messiah, an individual.

Look at what God says at Jesus’ baptism.

Mark 1:11

¹¹ And ^wa voice came from heaven, ^x“You are my beloved Son;⁴ with you I am well pleased.”

This is Jesus entering into His earthly ministry as the Messiah, acknowledged by the Father.

I know it has been several minutes, but do you remember me saying as we began today that there was a great deal of religious language in Ephesians 1:3-14? In this paragraph we are blessed, chosen, predestined. We have been graced. Things have been made abundant for us. Things have been made known to us. All these things are in the “first person we”.

As modern readers, as Christians, we read this and tend to think that the “us” is “us” because we are followers of Jesus. That is true, we are followers of Jesus. But we need to keep reading.

Who is the first referent, (the chosen) in this case; in the story line of Israel? It is Israel! Look at verse 12 again.

¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be ^dto the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you heard ^ethe word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, ^fwere sealed with the ^gpromised Holy Spirit,

What was the plan from the beginning, with Adam and Eve? It was to reach everyone, the nations. In verse 13, Paul shifts from us to y'all. The point is that the blessing can't stop with Israel because the plan was always to reach the nations. However, now we all have access through one Spirit. The two things have become one.

In the OT, the election was corporate. If you were an Israelite, you were/ a part of, the elect. However, one could opt out if so desired, through apostasy. Someone from the outside, the Gentile world could opt in/ be grafted in... this is what the whole book of Ruth is about.

Notice that Paul doesn't say God predestined "you to be in Christ." He predestined you, "in Christ."

This subtlety means that Jesus is the predestined one. We get to be in Him! We weren't pre-programmed. Look at what Paul says in Ephesians 1:13.

¹³ In him you also, when you heard ^ethe word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, ^fwere sealed with the ^gpromised Holy Spirit,

Look at all the volition, (what we heard and believed) and therefore were sealed.

Let's not force Paul to say what he doesn't. Let's not force him to answer a question he's not interested in answering or force him into a theological debate he's not interested in having.

Let's let Paul and the bible define the terms. We can then rest in the work of Jesus Christ and God's plan of salvation that existed from the beginning. And that plan comes down to believing in the only one who could carry out the plan – Jesus.