

What was the point of the message on Sunday? Not sure? Well, if for some reason you missed it,

## ***Here's the Point ...***

### ***"We Must Center Our Lives On God-Centered Grace"***

#### **SERMON TEXT**

*"1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, 5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:1-6).*

#### ***1. The Plan of God***

What is your life centered on? We all base our lives on who we believe God to be and our grasp of what He's done for us. Worship is our response to God's revelation to us. After a brief introduction, Paul reveals God's plan in verses 3-6, which includes (v.3) Blessing us, (v.4) Choosing us, and (v.5) Predestining us.

- **God blessed us** (v.3):

Paul is in prison and he's talking about blessing. Do we know God this way? Even in trying circumstances, are we still praising God? How is this possible? Because Paul knows that true blessing isn't based on our stuff, or on our circumstances, but upon knowing who God is and what He has done for us in Christ. And why do some people have these spiritual blessings? Paul answers this question in verses 4 & 5. Because God has chosen us and predestined us in Christ and through Christ.

- **God chose us** (v.4):

Paul understands that from God's perspective, even before He created the world, He chose us in Christ. This is a staggering truth. The word for chose is "*eklegomai*." It means to select, to make a special choice. Paul is writing to the church and in no uncertain terms says, "You were chosen by God. You were selected by God before time began."

- **God predestined us** (v.5):

How did we become God's children? By receiving Christ by faith? Yes! (John 1:12) But there's a reason we received Him. Because God set His love upon us before time. The word for predestined is "*prohorizo*." It means to mark off beforehand, before the horizon, to mark out before time. What this means is that before the world began, God chose who He would save and marked them off to be His children. This biblical truth should cause us to raise our hearts in praise to God's amazing grace. However, for most, all this does is cause them to raise questions and objections. So let's deal with these accordingly.

## Questions, Objections, and Misconceptions:

### 1.) We should just avoid doctrines like these all-together. All that matters is having a relationship with Jesus and living right.

Someone who believes this way cannot avoid getting into doctrine. When a person makes this type of statement, it is in fact, their doctrine. As soon as you ask, "How do I know I have a relationship with Jesus? Why should I live in a certain way?" That person's answer is immediately into belief and doctrine. We can't live the Christian life until we know what it means to be a Christian, how we can be sure that God loves us, and why we should be living opposite of the world. All of life is based on doctrinal truth. Paul didn't avoid it, and we can't avoid it either.

### 2.) Didn't God just see ahead of time that I would choose Him, and then He chose me?

A famous verse that leads people to think this way is Romans 8:29, which says, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined ..." There's a few problems with interpreting it as if our choice came before God's. First, the word "foreknow" here does not mean to know facts and events about a person but to intimately know someone as Adam "knew" his wife and she conceived. Second, it's pretty redundant. God wouldn't have to choose us if we had already chosen Him. If that were the case, Paul would have written 'post-destined,' not predestined. Third, we are born spiritually dead in our sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1). Therefore, God knew that He would have to choose us and change us, because spiritually dead people cannot make a spiritually alive decision. Jesus said in John 6:37, "All those that the Father has given to me, will come to me." Notice the order. He doesn't say, because people come to me, my Father gives them to me." God's choice comes first.

### 3.) What about my freedom? These doctrines make it seem that people do not have free-will?

How are you defining freedom and free-will? The Bible teaches that man is born free to choose what He wants. We have the freedom to choose. The problem is that man in his fallen state does not want the God of the Bible (which is really not freedom at all). Our desires are held captive by sin. We see this in Genesis 3. In sin, Adam and Eve ran from God. They no longer desired God. In the salvation process, God runs to us and changes our hearts to freely want to choose Him. "For freedom, Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1). We are free to choose God because God has worked on our behalf to change our desires which determine our choices.

### 4.) This makes God out to be cruel and unfair by choosing some and not others.

To believe that God is cruel and unfair, one would need to first believe that everyone deserves God's grace. But then it wouldn't be grace. Grace is receiving what you didn't earn and don't deserve. As Mark Webb writes, "God stands at the door of Heaven with His arms outstretched, inviting all to come. Yet all men without exception are running in the opposite direction towards Hell as hard as they can go. So God, in election, graciously reaches out and stops this one, and that one, and this one over here, and that one over there, and effectually draws them to Himself by changing their hearts, making them willing to come ... Were it not for election, Heaven would be an empty place, and Hell would be bursting at the seams!" Therefore, it's not a matter of God being fair and just that we are chosen. It's a matter of abundant mercy and God-centered grace.

### 5.) If God has already chosen people, then I don't need to witness. Why evangelize?

This misconception is fairly easy to see through. First, we share the gospel because we're commanded to. Second, if God has ordained that I will eat tonight, that doesn't mean I don't need to feed myself. The God who has ordained the ends has also ordained the means to accomplish those ends. God invites us to partner with Him in His work of bringing men and women to Himself by sharing the gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). "How will they believe in whom they've never heard?" (Rom. 10:14) God will save His people and He asks us to be a part of that glorious and gracious plan by sharing the good news of Jesus.

### 6.) These doctrines cause people to become arrogant and prideful.

These doctrines will cause arrogance and pride only if people view God choosing them like captains choose players to be on a team. If we believe that God chose us based on something He saw in us, then we don't grasp God-centered grace. On the contrary, God saw nothing in us that was worthy of choosing us. He made rebellious, selfish and unworthy criminals His everlasting children. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom.5:8). Embracing the truth of God-centered grace causes humility, not pride.

## 2. The Purpose of God

So what's the purpose of God's plan? What's the point? What's all this for?

We see the purpose in verse 4. It says, "*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.*" God chose us to fix us and to present us. God didn't bless us because we were a blessing, but to make us a blessing. God didn't choose us because we were holy, but to make us holy. God didn't love us because we were lovely, but to make us lovely.

The good news of the gospel is not only that we escape the penalty of sin, but that we also escape the power of sin. God is in the business of buying back broken lives, fixing them up, and making them new again. God sets apart all those that come to Him in faith and begins His transforming work, a work that He *will* finish. That's why Paul could say, "I am confident of this very thing, that *He who began* a good work in you, *will* bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Whatever sin we may be struggling with, we need to know that God is working right now on our behalf to conquer it. God chose us to fix us. He's going to fix all our faults and one day, Christ will present us blameless before the Father. It will be the reverse of the typical American wedding. When Lindsay and I were married, what happened? The father of the bride presented her in white to her groom. But in the last day, Christ, the Groom, will present His bride, the church in white before His Father. What a glorious hope and promise!

Here's the other purpose we see in verse 5. It says, "*He predestined us for adoption ...*" God the Father set His love upon us before time to make us His children. As Christians we never have to live in fear of being abandoned as spiritual orphans. We never have to be anxious that we will be sent out of the house for something we have done or not done. We have been adopted. If the Son has set us free, we are free indeed! Because of our faith in the life and death of Jesus in our place, we are free to know we belong in God's family forever. Adopted by God: A legal act in which criminals *before* God are now known as children *of* God.

## 3. The Praise of God

Paul is in prison, yet he's not pleading for his release. He's praising God. He says in verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." The word for blessed here is *Eulogetos*. It's where we get the English word "eulogy." The word means to speak well of, or to praise. Paul's heart is so fixed on God; he begins in verse 3 by praising Him and three times in this section (v.6, v.12, and v.14) we read, "...to the praise of God's glory." Embracing the several God-centered truths in verses 3-14, should cause us to look away from ourselves and look to Christ who purchased our lives at the cross to bring us to praise Him.

Centering our lives on God-centered grace fuels our worship. It is embracing God-Centered Grace, over and above Man-Centered Grace (which is no grace at all) that propels us to give all the praise to God that He deserves. Not 95%. Not 99%. 100%! God's not waiting for you to earn five percent of His grace. It's impossible. We must stop trying to work *off* what Christ has already paid *for*. When Jesus said "It is finished," He meant it.

When we understand God-Centered Grace (that God chose to set His love upon us, not based on anything we have done) then we will finally find peace to live our lives out of those two words, "In Him" or "In Christ," which are mentioned a dozen times in this chapter. May God-centered grace fill our hearts with wonder as we embrace the God of mystery and may God-centered grace cause our hearts to beat with endless praise.