

The Blessing of Election

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Date: 04 May 2025

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[0 : 00] Many of you, no doubt, have heard of the famous pastor, Martin Lloyd-Jones, the famous pastor! of Westminster Chapel in London. He led a famous revival of British evangelicalism in the 19th! century. He was a major figure, and you probably know him most of all for his very long and lengthy sermon series, which are known to go line by line by line through a book of the Bible and attempt to be comprehensive and almost exhaustive. And his most famous sermon series is on the book of Romans.

And over the course of 12 years, he preached through the book of Romans. He preached 372 sermons. You can go buy them today. They're in 14 volumes. And the most interesting thing is that he actually died before he finished the book of Romans. He only made it halfway through the 14th chapter.

But the second most famous sermon series that he went through is the book of Ephesians. And over the course of verses 3 to 14, he had 24 sermons trying to extract everything out of this passage that I just read. Now normally, if I can confess this to you, I think Martin Lloyd-Jones is good, but he's a little long-winded. And you know, so going through that many sermons, you kind of wonder, when are we going to keep moving on? But 24 sermons seems completely reasonable to me for a passage like this. You can have 24 sermons over a deep passage like this. This is a passage that we are called to Sabar because it is one of the most glorious passages in all of Scripture. You know, if you are looking for a passage to memorize, particularly as a new Christian, there are a few passages that I would recommend more readily and heartily than this one. This is a passage that you can spend every single day for the rest of your life meditating on, repeating to yourself, and you will not come to the bottom of it. And there are other passages like that in Scripture, but this one is unique.

You know, Paul here, he's writing to the church in Ephesus and he can hardly finish greeting them in the first two verses before he launches head first into a prayer of praise. And once he keeps going, he just keeps going and going and going and he doesn't come up for air. Really, this entire first chapter is really just one long prayer. And verses 3 to 14 are actually just one sentence in the Greek.

There's 202 words in these verses that I just read, all one sentence, and it's a traditional torture text that you hand to seminary students trying to see when they come to an end and when they realize that it's all just one sentence. This is the longest sentence in the entire New Testament. And Paul just keeps going and going and going in praise of God. And what you need to see there is that Paul considers an absolute necessity to begin by praising God before coming to the some of the weightiest doctrines in Scripture, like salvation by grace alone through faith alone in chapter 2.

[3 : 23] Now, Paul does not believe that deep theology is separable from high praise. Those two things, they go together. And as soon as you begin to try to separate those two, you'll find that your theology becomes weaker and weaker. You have less and less interest in it. And you find that your praise, also, you begin to lose things to sing about. And you begin to not desire to come to God in praise.

We need praise and theology together. And this passage is a master class in what doxology looks like. And he's very intentionally teaching us about what it means to be a Christian. This passage is one long list of the blessings that we have in Jesus Christ. And he lays out blessing after blessing after blessing. And every single one you can take off the shelf. And you can hold on to it, no matter what circumstances you're in.

No matter whether things are going great for you or things are going horribly. These are blessings, which you can always use and hold on to. This passage is an opportunity for us to clothe our love of God with deeper and deeper reasons for that love. And I want to cover this entire passage in detail,

but we simply don't have the time. So, like last week we only covered two verses. This week we're only going to cover two verses. We're only going to cover verses three and four. And I want to cover it in just three points with you today. The assurance of blessing, the blessing of election, and the purpose of election. And I want to start here with that first point, the assurance of blessing. Paul here in verse three is declaring to the Ephesian church that they are blessed. That this is something that they can know for certain. They can have assurance about it. They have blessings in Jesus Christ. And the first thing I want you to see is that it is the Trinity itself that blesses us. You know, this is this entire passage that I just read.

There's a nice Trinitarian order, but you can just go through with a knife. Verses four to six talk about the blessings we have from the Father. Verses seven to twelve talk about the blessings of the Son. And verses thirteen and fourteen talk about the blessings of the Holy Spirit. Paul here is explaining how our redemption is planned by God the Father, how it is accomplished by Jesus Christ, and how it is applied to us by the Holy Spirit. It's all the Trinity working together to redeem us and bless us. And you can see that Trinitarian structure in miniature in verse three. God the Father has blessed us in Christ Jesus with spiritual blessings, as it says here. And that term, spiritual blessings, that is not just spiritual with a small s. It's really spiritual with a capital s. These are blessings that are not just simply not physical or more than physical. These are blessings that come from the Spirit himself. Really all of these blessings have to do with the Spirit. And what you need to see is that the Trinity itself has made it a point to bless you as a Christian. And that should bring you tremendous comfort because it gives you absolute assurance. When you see the Father work, you know the Son is working, you know the Spirit is working, and where the Son is there also are the Father and the Spirit. The Trinity works together as one God, not simply three persons separately, but as one God. And they are working together to bless us in Jesus Christ. If you have one of these blessings, you have every single one of these blessings. You cannot separate them out. This is one work by one God in three persons, and we have been blessed by our triune God.

[7 : 51] And the Trinity has blessed us particularly in Christ. Christ is absolutely central in this passage. In various ways, you are described as in Christ, under Christ, through Christ, almost a dozen times in this passage.

It's a drumbeat constantly. The focus is constantly back upon Christ. All of these blessings are particularly accomplished by Christ himself. And yes, the Father and the Spirit, they're integral to our salvation.

It's not a church, but it is our union with Christ that particularly brings us these blessings. You know, if you want a phrase to help you read the Bible better, the phrase, in Christ, is a really good one. Because once you start noticing that phrase, you will see it everywhere. On average, in Paul's letters, he uses it once per chapter. And it's one of the core things that he wants to teach you. You are in Jesus Christ.

And therefore, what he has becomes yours, even as your sin becomes his. And that means that you have been blessed with every blessing that is possible. Every blessing that the Son has is ours because we are in him.

[9 : 15] We are able to enjoy every blessing that the Son of God has. And if you ever look around and you think, well, maybe the angels, maybe they have some blessing that we don't have.

But you just ask yourself, has God the Father held back anything from his Son? The answer is no. And we are in Jesus Christ. We are able to say that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. And you need to understand the magnitude of that statement. There is no other blessing that you can covet spiritually in anyone else.

You have them all in Jesus Christ. And Christian, you have no reason to not be encouraged. I don't mean that there's no reason not to weep. That there's no reason not to be sad. Our Savior was a man of sorrows. He knew what it meant to weep. But in the Gospel, we have all the blessings. We have every means of comfort that God can give us. And we are able to look to the Gospel as a great balm for no matter what difficulties we may face. There is always a remedy in Jesus Christ, no matter what comes to us.

All three persons of the Trinity have made it their goal to redeem you and bless you in Jesus Christ. And Paul here, he is unfurling our inheritance, showing what is ours because we are in Jesus Christ, what Jesus Christ's death has brought us and what we have inherited in him.

John Calvin, he has this great line on this passage. He says that if you understand that we, if you work these truths into your heart, you will never look anywhere else for any new doctrine.

[11:12] You will be completely satisfied by what you have in Jesus Christ because you will know that there is nothing else anywhere else. You will have tasted of true bread and living water. You will have found comfort for your soul for any situation. And it is all in Jesus.

But secondly, Paul here covers this blessing of election. And he goes into this, in particular in the first half of verse 4. Paul begins to describe why we are blessed.

And he says, the first blessing we possess is election. That is the first thing that he lays out for us, the people of God. And by that he means that those who are Christians are literally chosen. They're picked out to be the people of God. They are predestined to believe in Christ by God himself. God chose Christians before they chose him. That is what we mean by election. And this is particularly the work of the Father. And we need to see that because we need to have a loving view of our Heavenly Father. There's a view that goes around and no one actually teaches it. But it happens everywhere. It happens even in the strongest of churches. This belief often is around that Jesus is really the one who convinces the Father to love us on the cross. That Jesus is the one who takes his Father and keeps him from being an angry Father and then convinces him to love us. But that's the furthest thing from the truth.

First of all, on the cross, Jesus is not just saving you from the Father's wrath. He's also saving you from his wrath and the Spirit's wrath. It's the wrath of the triune God that he is protecting you from on the cross.

[13:04] But secondly, it is also God the Father who sent his Son into the world to die for sinners. The Father understood what was happening at the cross. He initiated it. He sent his Son. This was a plan from the very beginning. This is a blessing that we were able to say that salvation is planned by God the Father, that it has been predestined, that he has predestined his people. And that might seem a little strange to talk about election and predestination as a blessing. That language is not always used.

And sometimes we can think of election and predestination as really these cold hard doctrines. These are brainy doctrines for brainy people, perhaps particularly for Presbyterians.

But this is not a doctrine for great, mighty, and brainy Christians or cold Christians for the pros and chosen. This is a doctrine that Paul begins his letter with because he understands that this is for every Christian. This is a doctrine that all Christians are supposed to hold on to.

This doctrine is supposed to be part of the very foundation of what it means to be a Christian, part of your self-understanding. This is a blessing because it vividly displays for us the grace of God in a way almost nothing else does as clearly. If you would, I want you to turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 7. You don't have to, but you can. Deuteronomy chapter 7, and we'll just briefly read verses 6 to 8. You know, here in Deuteronomy chapter 7, Moses is giving the final pep talk before he leads Israel into the Promised Land, and he is going through the entire history of Israel, explaining everything that needs to happen, everything that has happened up to this point.

And he says there in chapter 7, verse 6 to 8, for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people, but the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the 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.

[15:37] Moses' point in those verses is the exact same point as Paul's. Nothing in you deserves God's grace and favor, and yet God chose you. Nothing in you, nothing at all, nothing in this passage gives us the slightest hint that this blessing is conditioned upon you or your behavior whatsoever. I want you to notice this occurs before the creation of the world, before the foundation of the world. Before you've done anything to be worthy of this blessing at all, before you've done anything at all, God chose you.

And if you were to say, well, what if God looked down the corridors of time? And sometimes people use that language. God looked down the corridors of time and then he picked out Christians based on their behavior. And that's a really bad way of thinking about it. But if we were to think about it that way, what would God see if you were to look down those corridors of time? He would see what Paul, what Calvin calls just materials for destruction. He'd see rebels rebelling against him. He

would not see people eager to follow him. He would see sinners in need of a savior. Sinners who are in need of his son to die upon the cross for them. Sinners that need the spirit to work inside them, to work faith in them, to bring them from death to life. That's what he would see. And instead of him choosing, choosing us because of anything in us, this passage says that we are chosen in him, meaning in Christ, not ourselves. Christ is the context of our election, not us. It's not about us. It's about Jesus. And there's a very reasonable question that you can ask at this point, a perfectly reasonable question. You can hear that and you could think, well, why? Why is it that God loves me to elect me? That is a perfectly reasonable question to ask.

That is a perfectly natural question to ask. But when you look at scripture and when you come with that question, what is the answer that you receive? You receive the answer, he loves you because he loves you.

And is that difficult to understand? Absolutely. But what we are running into is the mysteries of God's grace. Something that we cannot fathom. Something that we are called to see and only fall down in worship and praise of. We are called to fall down in worship before the throne of grace, wondering why is it that we we are here? We should not be here. And yet God has called us to himself and worked in us and called us to worship him as his adopted children. You know, the second that you start looking inside yourself and you start trying to find a reason why God loves you and you say, that's the reason God elected me, that is the second that you turn this blessing into a reward and into an expectation. Where you turn grace upon its head. This is grace in the most vivid way imaginable. It is grace simply for grace's sake.

Something that you cannot find an explanation for inside yourself. Only inside God. Only inside him and his glory and love. The last reason Paul is telling us about election is for us to become prideful. For us to become self-confident in who we are. That we have something inside us that is worthy of God's love.

[19:41] Paul here is telling us about election for a very particular purpose. He is telling us about election because he believes it is practical. It is a practical thing for us. Our election is supposed to lead somewhere. It is supposed to lead to a holy and blameless life at the end of verse 4.

You know, of course, everything we have from God ultimately leads to the glory of God. God has elected us in order that we may live a holy and blameless life before him.

This is something that people can be troubled by. Because the concern about predestination and election can be that it actually undercuts your Christian life. You lose motivation. You know, part of that is because you wonder, well, why share the gospel with anyone? And if you want an answer to that question, I recommend you go see J.I. Packer's little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. It is one of the best succinct works on that subject that you can ever find. And really, when you share the gospel, what you need to know is that people are lost and dead. And your goal in evangelism is not to make them alive and of your own power. It is simply to present the gospel, to present Jesus Christ and let the Spirit do the work. Because only the Spirit can save them, not you. And once you realize the magnitude of the condition of sinners around you, you will realize that God is the only solution and has been the only solution. And that frees you up from all of your anxiety to share the gospel. Your goal is just to present Jesus and let God do the rest. That's part of it. But the second reason that people often think that election undercuts the Christian in life is because, well, why do anything? What, if you're truly elected by God, why actually live for Jesus or anything like that? But when you look at these verses, you see that that is completely opposite of the way Paul thinks. Paul thinks that election powers holy and fruitful living, that holy and faithful living is the fruit of our election. And if we don't live holy and blameless lives, then we undercut the entire purpose of this blessing. Indeed, it's doubtful whether we possess any of these blessings at all, because we are called to just be in Jesus Christ and to live the way of being in Jesus. We are called to be holy and blameless before God in love. I want you to look at the very tail end of verse 4. There's a period in most of your translations. Holy and blameless in his sight, period, in love. That's the way most of these translations go. And I like the ESV, I like the NIV, but the KJV, I think, has it a little bit better because the KJV moves the period and says holy and blameless in love, period. The reason that all these translations disagree is very simple. The comma wasn't invented yet. And when you have 202 words without commas, things get a little ambiguous.

And what we have here are two perfectly good and reasonable ways to read this passage. You can either say that we should be holy and blameless before him in love or in love he predestined us for adoption to himself. Both are perfectly reasonable. And I suspect that we're actually being teased

here, that Paul is intentionally putting forward a little ambiguity because both should be seen. But I prefer to put it, put the periods of its holy and blameless in love because our Christian living in all of its holiness, in all of its blamelessness is supposed to be characterized chiefly by love as we live our lives before God. Being holy before God means that we are devoted to him and him alone, that he is our greatest love, that he is the one that we desire above all else.

[24 : 05] And that is best described as love. Love is supposed to characterize every single aspect of you. It is supposed to characterize every single action. It is supposed to be the most foundational part about you.

You know, when I think about recipes, I think that there's more to a recipe than essentially the list of ingredients. You can have a list of ingredients and you can make the recipe, but I think there's more to it than that. You know, because the greatest predictor of whether I like a meal or not is really whether my mother or Anna made it. Okay, that's actually legitimately the biggest predictor of whether I like a meal. And that's because there's something attractive about home cooking. It's made in love. Love, it characterizes how the dish is made. And that's supposed to be how we are made.

God elected us in love before the foundation of the world. And what that means is before you were knit together in your mother's womb, before a single atom was created that would eventually make up your body, God elected you in love. And it is there at the very beginning. And that you are called as a Christian to show forth that love all around you in everything that you do.

God, is it any wonder that when people see Christians, they should think love? We have been shown love by God before the foundation of the world. How can it not pour out when we bear with each other in our burdens? How can it not pour out with the way we treat our spouses, with the way we treat our children, with the way we treat those who wrong us or our neighbors?

Our desire is to show forth the love of God, which has been shown to us. We love God not because we first loved him, but because he first loved us. And we are called to show forth that love in everything we do. And to make others wonder, what is that love? Where does it come from? How can I have that love?

[26 : 25] And the answer is simply to turn to Jesus Christ, to believe on him and to trust in him. And then you will truly understand the wonders that are in Jesus Christ. You know, Christian, our election is done and accomplished so that we may have assurance in it. But we are called to act like we are elected.

And Paul wants us to be praising God, but in the midst of that praise, we understand what Paul says in Ephesians 4.1. That we are to act in a way that is worthy of our calling. And Christian, there is no higher calling in all the world than to be called by a loving Lord from all eternity.

That is the greatest and most powerful call imaginable. And it should simply fill us with a desire to love our Savior more and more each and every day. You know, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Let us pray. Our most gracious and loving Heavenly Father, Lord, we are thankful for your word. And we are thankful for the blessings that we have in Jesus Christ.

We pray that we would meditate upon them and that we would just be in simple awe of the love that you have displayed to us. Love that defies any explanation. Love that simply points us deeper and deeper into your love.

[28 : 02] We pray, O Lord, that we would truly worship you well today because of that love. That we would desire to show forth that love all around us and that it would simply pour out of us.

And that we would seek to be in Jesus even as he is in us and as he is ministering to us. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.