

You Are Chosen!

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Paul says, blessed be the God who's blessed us with every spiritual blessing. And he takes us inside to see blessing after blessing, diamond after diamond.

Paul is after something in this blessing. He doesn't merely want us to learn to regurgitate the blessings we've received in Christ, but to stoop and fall in awestruck wonder.

He's after our hearts. He takes up these blessings so that we'd be taken up in wonder. These blessings begin in a place we might not expect.

They begin before the foundation of the world. Before anything was made, God was working in Jesus Christ. In a word where we're going is praise God the Father who chose to save sinners freely to the praise of his glorious grace.

[1 : 12] We break this out in three points. The first is God chose us in Christ. God chose us in Christ. The first spiritual blessing, the first diamond, as it were, is the doctrine of election.

And you see Paul follows immediately on the heels of verse 3. If you look down there with me, the Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, taking us through this magnificent gateway.

Paul immediately points back to what God has done in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Paul takes us back to before creation, before time, into a time in which only God existed.

And it was there and then that God determined to save a people for himself. What did he do back then in eternity?

Paul says very clearly he chose us. This word choose or elect is one of the many words capturing the saving purposes of God in these verses.

[2 : 34] It refers to the decision of God the Father to save specific men and women unto eternal life. Now if you know your Bibles, this idea of election is not new at all.

God chose Abraham while he was still in the Ur of the Chaldeans, worshiping the gods of his day. But he called him out to follow him. God chose Israel, as we read a little bit about in Exodus 19, to be his treasured possession.

He plucked them out of all the people of the earth to be his. So too God chooses all those who come to him by faith. His election, contrary to what we might think, is not random or arbitrary.

It is not haphazard or flippant. It is deliberate, calculated, and careful. But even though election is not new, these verses are difficult.

They are the deep end of the pool. One of the quotes that George Whitefield, an evangelist, used to always say is a quote by John Bradford, who said, Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance before he goes to the university of election and predestination.

[3 : 51] Why? Because these things are hard to understand. You know, as students of the Bible, our responsibility is not to go beyond what Scripture has said.

We do not go beyond it. We guard ourselves from conjecture and things like that. But we must go as far as Scripture does. Because where Scripture grows is the revelation of God.

And that's what we see in these verses. That this divine election is a revelation of God and his word. Now the question that divides generally two major responses to this verse, and that these verses like this, does God elect people because they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Or does God elect people in order that they shall believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? So does God elect people because they believe in Jesus Christ?

Does God, being all-knowing, look through the corridors of time to see who will respond to them and follow him and then choose to save them?

[5 : 01] I think based on these verses, I would argue, that's not the understanding of election that these verses put forward.

Rather, God elects people in order that they shall turn and follow and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The sovereign act of election is qualified in several ways in this verse, and that will help us understand why I would say that.

He chooses us. We see this in verse 4. If you look down there with me, He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. He chose us before we had been born.

Indeed, He chose us before anything was made, before the universe was created. Quite obviously then, He chose us before we had done anything good or bad.

He did not look through the corridors of time to choose those who would respond in time, but chose them before time existed. What kind of God would we worship if He just responded to what happened in time?

[6 : 13] When were the names written in heaven? When were they written in the book of life? Before the foundation of the world.

And what that means is that before the foundation of the world, God was working in Jesus Christ to bring out about a plan that would blow our minds.

And so God the Father set out to choose, or He did choose to save certain people. Then He created the universe. Then He created them. Then He brought about all the things that were necessary in the circumstances to call them to Christ.

These verses also say, Though He chose us in Him that we should be holy and blameless before Him. If He chose us that we should be holy and blameless, that means He did not choose us because we were holy and blameless.

He chose us knowing we would be deserving only of His just judgment. And as chapter 2 says, Knowing only that we, or knowing that we would be dead in trespasses and sins, so He chose us before time that we would be holy and blameless because of His prior decision to have mercy on us.

[7 : 38] Most importantly, He chose us in Him. John Stott says the juxtaposition of those pronouns is emphatic.

You may not use juxtaposition. That's just the placement of those pronouns is emphatic. He, God the Father, chose us, the undeserving, the ill-deserving, in Him.

The mystery behind divine election is that before the foundation of the world, God had us and Christ together in His mind.

You know, as we said a moment ago, election is not new in our Bible. God called out Abraham, chose Israel. But this is new. God chose us in Him.

What this means is that before the foundation of the world, God had determined to save a people solely through Jesus Christ, the ark, the ladder, the ram, the cloud and fire, the Passover lamb, the man of the rock, the bronze snake, all the bulls and goats were pointing forward to a salvation in the fullness of time in and through Jesus Christ.

[8 : 50] And so, before the foundation of the world, God had a plan for the fullness of time to unite a people through Him.

And if He chose us in Him, then He did not choose us for anything in us. There's no other name under heaven by which we must be saved in the name of Jesus.

God chose us in Him because that's the only way we could be saved. What we're meant to see is that if we trace our salvation all the way back, we trace it back to the Father before all time.

So the order is not He acts in election because we acted in response, but He acts in election so that we can act in time in response to the gospel in order that we shall believe.

Charles Spurgeon helpfully articulates his first understanding of this. In his book, Spurgeon Against, or Verses the Hyper-Calvinist, he says, when I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself.

[10 : 14] I can definitely say that's the way I felt in August of 2001. And though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea that the Lord was seeking me.

I did not, or I do not think the young convert is at first aware of this. I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths of the doctrine of election in my own soul.

One weeknight, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, though, how did you come to be a Christian?

I sought the Lord. But how did you come to seek the Lord? The truth flashed across my mind. In a moment, I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him.

I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, how came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures?

[11 : 27] I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all and that He was the author of my faith and so the doctrine of grace opened up to me and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day and I desire to make this my constant confession.

I ascribe my change wholly to God. What I think he helpfully articulates so well is that prior work of God.

Why do you believe? And your sister doesn't or your brother doesn't. Surely the influences were quite similar.

What about the grade school friend that went through youth group with you all the way up? What happened to them? What's different? Is it really this decision we made or is it that God is behind it all working mysteriously for His glory?

And so the diamond is election. Paul blesses God for this spiritual blessing. Now you may say, that doesn't sound like a blessing at all. That doesn't sound good.

[12 : 40] That sounds awful. There's a scene in The Cinderella Man, one of my favorite movies, about the boxer Jim Braddock kind of making, or fighting through the depression, trying to get work for his family.

There's a particular scene that's very provoking where he goes down to the dock. He just needs a day's work and there's not much work to go around. He's fighting to help unload a ship, pushing up to the gate with a bunch of other men trying to do the same thing.

And the guy just randomly picks five men. Sometimes we can think that's the way the doctrine election is. There's all these people pounding at the door and God saying, you, not you.

You, not you. But the biblical picture is not that at all. The biblical picture is people running away from God.

There were no lines at the ark. Like there's no one left behind. They were ridiculing Noah. So too. That's the reality.

[13 : 52] God's opening his arms. He holds out his arms, Romans 11, all day long to a guilty and rebellious people that run away from him.

The doctrine of election just means that God stops some and turns them around to follow him.

Helpfully, Mark Webb says, I think it's very helpful in understanding what's going on here.

He says, election keeps no one out of heaven who would otherwise have been there. But it keeps a whole multitude of sinners out of hell who would otherwise have been there.

Were it not for election, heaven would be an empty place. No one seeks God, Romans 3. No one follows him.

And hell would be bursting at the seams. How does all this work out? You know, that's the stuff that spills a lot of ink. The great American preacher, Donald Gray Barnhouse, used to use an illustration.

[14 : 55] I've told about it dozens of times in our new members class. I think helpfully captures it well. He says to imagine the doors of heaven like a cross, a cross that's so big that there's a door in it.

And over the door were the words from Revelation, whosoever will may come. And so this great invitation, whoever would come, can come. That's the way we're called to present it, the free and true offer of the gospel to everyone.

And so every man, woman, and child who would come to the cross to believe in Jesus Christ is saved. But he says on the other side of the door, when they look back, it doesn't say whoever so will will come or whoever so wills may come.

It says chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. I think that captures the way the mystery of this works out. God calls us to respond to him in faith.

And it's real faith that we place our personal trust in him. But election is seen in hindsight as we realize the prior work of God preparing all those things so that we might trust in him.

[16:10] And so this first diamond is election. Point two, God chose us as sons. God chose us as sons.

The second spiritual blessing, the second diamond is adoption. He says, look down there with me in verse five. In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.

This word predestined occurs six times in the New Testament and is only used of God. It underlines again the reality that God takes initiative and brings about salvation.

It's a compound word. This pre and destined. You know, this destined was kind of a word that was used for marking out areas or marking out land.

Kind of like a surveying type word. And so it's saying before time, so pre, destined, before time, God set out the limits of his people. Determined the boundaries of them.

[17:16] Not merely that they would be his people as we're about to learn, but that they would be his children. So it says, he predestined us for adoption.

He did not just write down the names in the book of life. He brought them into his family. Paul turns another diamond, so to speak, to take in the wonder of this eternal decree of God.

Numerous pictures of salvation exist in the New Testament, but none is more precious than adoption. Adoption, and this particular word for adoption was common in the Greco-Roman world and referred to an adoption as a male for someone who didn't have a male so that that male could be the heir.

So within this word is this idea of adoption as sons. Adoption of an heir.

So if you had a massive estate, you had only daughters, you would adopt an heir to be an heir to your estate. Now why does Paul choose this word that includes not merely adoption, but a sonship, but includes adoption as a son.

[18:34] I think it's so helpful to realize this has its roots not merely in Greco-Roman culture, but in the Old Testament itself. When God calls Israel, actually before he calls them out of Egypt, he says, let my son go that he might worship me.

Hosea 11, 1, for I called out of Egypt my son. So he refers to the people of God as his son, to Israel as his son.

Beneath the name of son has deep affection and love. Throughout the Old Testament, he calls Ephraim, Ephraim, my dear child, and Israel, the precious sons of Zion.

But also in the Old Testament, God calls the king, his son. He promises to David that I'll have a son, a son of yours, will sit on the throne forever and I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son. And so this idea of a son is increasing in the Old Testament and increases all the more when we hear these more explicit proclamations about the Messiah.

[19:48] We see Isaiah 7, for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And so this promise is that the son will come and he will be adopted into the family.

But in Galatians 3, it says, for in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God by faith. Now the NIV translate that, all of you are children of God by faith.

I get it dead wrong because they miss out on the opportunity to capture what Paul is trying to say. What he's trying to say is that, in trying to be as clear as possible, all Christians are given the status of the son himself.

Throughout the New Testament, again and again, Jesus refers to God as the father. Again and again, he says, God is my father. He prays to the father. He does the will of the father. He pleases the father.

He anticipates the joy of returning to the presence of the father. He never refers to him as anything else but the father. But on the cross, suspended between heaven and earth, he said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[20:56] Why? So that, as Hebrews 2 says, so that he might bring many sons to glory, that they might call him my father. And so, we're given, what he's trying to say is we're given the status reserved for the son himself.

We are sons by faith and heirs of eternal life and every spiritual blessing in the beloved.

God has one son, but through Christ, he brings many sons to glory, chosen in Christ and adopted through Christ to the praise of his glory.

Now, there are a few stories more distressing than stories of orphans. I remember being in seminary and one of the men in my dorm was a Rwandan refugee, a Rwandan orphan. He lived, if you know, if you remember the 90s, he lived through the genocide in 1994, a power struggle, after a power struggle for several years, the Hutu people began systematically killing the Tutsi people, a pretty arbitrary racial distinction there.

[22 : 19] And in something like 90 days, nearly a million people died. So my buddy Benjamin was a Tutsi.

He told me the story of hiding in the rafters of his house, watching over 40 members of his family be executed.

Knowing they were coming for him, he said he crawled out to the road and laid among the dead. In God's mercy, an American Red Cross worker stumbled upon him and brought him to safety. Beloved, that's the picture of our salvation. we were orphans, but even in a more distressing situation.

We were not orphans because we were abandoned or forsaken. We were orphans because we ran away. We were separated from Christ, alienated from the people of God, strangers to the promise.

[23 : 34] You can imagine the Gentile audience getting this letter, very aware of how they sat outside the purposes of God, but then they've been adopted in as sons into the family.

So adoption reminds us that we are not among the family because of our birth or background or family tree. The adopted share, none of those things.

But we're also not adopted because, we're not adopted as among the people of God because of our decision. Adoption is precisely a decision you don't make for yourself. but one someone makes for you to love you and care for you.

And so that's the story of our adoption as well. He adopted us to himself. I love the way it qualifies what God has done in Christ.

Look in verse 4, he adopted us but in love he predestined us for adoption according to the purpose of his will. Those things are getting at the attitude of God the Father.

[24 : 33] It wasn't a cold calculation. It was done in love. The saving purposes of God are carried forward according to his delight and his joy. It throws out forever any notion that God the Father or Jesus Christ came to rescue us from God the Father which we can be tempted to believe when we read the Old Testament.

People might capture it that way. It's not that way at all. In love before the foundation of the world God sent Christ. Christ. And so the Father does not love us because Christ died for us.

Christ died for us because the Father loves us. I love the one of the most common titles in the New Testament and in the book of Ephesians is that God is now the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lest there be any fear left in your heart. He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe some of you God wants to set you free from hardness of heart towards God the Father.

It's common for believers to have hard thoughts about God. I mean we're talking about election. First temptation in the garden was to doubt the goodness of God.

[25 : 44] We're meant to learn the love of God from the love of our earthly father. Maybe your father was never there. Maybe he left.

Maybe he's there but he was there but maybe he may as well have not been there because he was working or distracted. Maybe he was there but not there for you in the right way.

Maybe he was annoyed by you. Maybe he tore you down. Maybe he hit you. Maybe he took advantage of you.

Maybe he's still bullying you. If he is I'd love to talk to you. When it comes to God the Father you might be tempted to assume you don't want anything to do with him.

You find only hard thoughts in your heart about him. You assume it's only right that you view him as cold, calculated, tough, severe, even heartless and cruel. You assume it's not right for you to think of him as good because of your sins, your failures and your missteps, your blemishes and your stains but in love he predestined you for adoption through Jesus Christ.

[27 : 03] This truth, this precious reality is meant to silence forever those fears and overwhelm you with the love of God the Father. In his eternal determination to adopt us as his children it is as if the Father utters these unfathomable words to you.

I love you. I have always loved you. I want you to be in my family. I want you to be with me forever.

I want to wash you and cleanse you. I want to bless you and exalt you. I want to fill you with joy and sing over you. I want you to be mine and I want to be yours.

yours. You know they say that fear and love have an opposite relationship.

By the love of God perfect love cast out fear that God would set you free from slavery to fear forever.

[28 : 16] The love of God whispered in this precious reality. So God chose us as sons and God chose us for the praise of his glory.

Point three God chose us for the praise of his glory. The third spiritual blessing if we can put it that way the third diamond is the meaning behind it all.

There are kind of purpose clauses that run through this you see those. you know verse four that we should be holy and blameless according to the purpose of his will these purpose clauses but none is more significant than this repeated refrain to the praise of his glorious grace.

Look in verse six to the praise of his glorious grace. Down in verse twelve to the praise of his glory. Again verse fourteen to the praise of his glory.

But this first instance is a little bit different it says to the praise of the glory of his grace. Why did God create the world?

[29 : 32] Why did God knowing the whole creation would sin and rebel against him choose a people for himself? Why did God bring them into his family as sons and daughters?

There is no other explanation than the praise of the glory of his grace. I love this. You know we often speak about the glory of God.

I think Piper helpfully says the glory of God is the greatness of God going public. So the public display of his character and his goodness and his greatness. But here is the praise of the glory of his grace.

How is grace glorious? We praise him for the glory of his grace by praising him for the gift it bestows eternal salvation for guilty sinners.

We praise him for the glory of grace for the gift it bestows. We praise him for the glory of his grace for the horror from which it delivers eternal destruction.

[30 : 35] salvation. We praise him for the glory of his grace for the manner in which it was secured. The incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection of none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we see here if glory is the greatness of God going public then salvation is the greatness of grace going public. The heavens declare the glory of God but the cross declares the glory of his grace.

All that is done from before the foundation of the world that will be summed up in Jesus Christ for all time is all about praising God for the glory of his grace.

And so how do we do this? How do we live for the praise of the glory of his grace? Two little application points I was thinking about.

One is make God the single boast boast in your praise. Make God the single boast for by grace you've been saved.

[31 : 41] It's not your own doing it's the gift of God not a result of works so that no one may boast. All that God has done for you in Jesus Christ is meant to remove every ground of boasting in anything but Jesus Christ.

all that God has done for you was meant to make you wasn't meant to make you think less of yourself as though getting down on yourself is the answer but all that God has done for you in Christ was also not meant to make you think more highly of yourself either.

The old guys did a wonderful job of holding together this reality that the grace of God magnifies two things our utter desperation and so they would say we're worms you know we're worms and yet God is great so the grace of God magnifies both of these realities but I'm so fearful in our culture and our Christian culture as well.

We're trying to smuggle in some character. We talk as if God has done what God has done for us in Christ was so that we would know how beautiful we are.

Worthy we are or valuable we are. I want to consider one modern worship tune at the risk of all of you hating me by the end of the meeting. I won't read the title but you'll probably know it.

[33 : 11] It says I'm standing at your door my heart is calling yours come fall into my arms. There's biblical things going on there. You're weary from it all been running for too long I'm here to bring you home.

I'm reaching out I'll chase you down I dare you to believe how much I love you now. I think that is true biblically I dare you to believe it.

Don't be afraid I'm your strength we'll be walking on the water dancing on the waves. Continues says a few more things but most concerningly in the bridge it says I set every star in place so that you would remember my name.

I don't think there's a verse you can find there. I made it all for you you are my masterpiece you are the reason I sing this is my song for you and that's written from the perspective of God singing you are the reason I sing we can't say that biblically it's a song that does may puff you up make you feel good but it's not true you can't sing that to the God who says he doesn't need anything and is not served by human hands as though he did he gives he's not one who enjoys being served he is the server and so God is the masterpiece the heavens were created for his glory not so we would see our masterpiece we are created for his glory the song is about salvation but it's man centered and it changes the ground of boasting in some ways to us it turns the telescope from God and his greatness and to us maybe halfway and so we mustn't do it may God the single boast

Christ died not to show us how great and worthy and lovely we are he died to show us how great he is how wonderful he is so make God the single boast in your praise but also make God the single object of your praise God the peculiar which is another way of saying the only object of your praise object of your praise if God so values you sets so much by you has bestowed greater mercies upon you than on all the ungodly in the world is it too little a requital for you to make God the peculiar object of your praise and thankfulness if God so distinguishes!

[36 : 09] you with his mercies you ought to distinguish yourself in his praises you should make it your great care and study how to glorify that God who's been so peculiarly merciful to you we turn the telescope back to him to give him all the praise and all the glory last time I was in a church that went through Ephesians 1 a guy got to the praise of his glory tattooed on his arm so maybe we'll bring an artist when we're done with Ephesians 1 and get it done for a few of us but I thought you know if I'm gonna get a tattoo that's a pretty good one to the praise of his glory what is God doing what is he working it's all to the praise of his glory so praise God the father who chose to save sinners freely for the praise of his glorious grace you know Paul begins this blessing because it's just bursting forth and his own blessing to

God but it's an invitation to us to realize the great spiritual blessing we have in Jesus Christ that we would be a people of praise of amazement people have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light declaring his greatness and his glory may God help us as we do let us pray father in heaven cast ourselves onto you this day lord we offer ourselves to you sincerely and completely lord we want to live for the praise of his glory to make Christ great not that we make him great by his praises but we do magnify him by being satisfied in him looking away from ourselves to him and his glory and his grace lord I pray for anything that was hard to hear lord I pray anything unhelpful would be and unbiblical rather would be forgotten

I pray the word of God would strengthen us and hold us and keep us as we run to Jesus Christ and cling to him and the great inheritance we've received through him we pray in Christ's name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com