

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE

(LESSON TEN)

THE ELECTION OF GOD

EPHESIANS 1:1-6

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION

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 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.

The Word of God reveals many aspects of God's sovereignty. The aspect of God's sovereignty that has provoked the most controversy is the one that deals with His plan of salvation, particularly as it concerns the decree of election. In this Lesson, we will consider the difficult doctrine of predestination, a doctrine which inspires more theological discussion than perhaps any other in the Bible.

Most persons, when they set out on a journey, have an intended destination in mind. We sometimes speak of our "destiny," by which we mean our ultimate destination. The prefix **pre-**, means "beforehand" or in "advance." When the Bible attaches the prefix **pre-** to the word "destination," it is indicating that God almighty has decreed a destination for His people beforehand or in advance.

In verses **3-6** of our text Paul writes, "*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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved*" (**English Standard Version**).

In this passage, when he introduces the ideas of predestination and election, Paul speaks of the saints as being "*blessed.*" Obviously, he did not view these concepts in a negative light. Instead, when he thought about the predestination and election of God, Paul was motivated to express profound gratitude to God and he was inspired to glorify Him. In other words, Paul viewed the concepts of predestination and election as a blessing! Why is it, then, that so many of God's people view these ideas in a negative light? Brothers and sisters, when we study the doctrines of predestination and election, we are confronted with the depths and riches of the mercy and grace of God.

If we are to be faithful to the Word of God, if, in other words, we are to be biblical in our theology, we must grapple with the concepts of predestination and election.

We certainly cannot dismiss them or pretend that they do not exist, because the Bible refers to both of these concepts often and explicitly. The doctrines of predestination and election were not introduced by Augustine, Luther or Calvin but are clearly set forth in God's Word.

It is important for us to understand that predestination is not the same thing as election, although they are closely related. Predestination has to do with God's decrees concerning anything. Election is a specific type of predestination. It deals with God's choosing certain persons in Christ for the purpose of salvation and to be adopted into the family of God. We may define election as "a decree of God before creation in which He chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of His sovereign grace."

The Scriptures make it very clear that Election to Salvation is in no way conditioned by or dependent upon anything that distinguishes the saved from the unsaved prior to the day of their effectual calling to become members of the family of God. **Romans 9:21** makes this very clear: "*Hath not the potter power over the clay, **of the same lump** to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*" It is "*of the same lump*" that both the saved and the unsaved are constituted. There is no difference between them, for in **Romans 3:21-2** we read, "*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: **for there is no difference:** For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" Before God, the elect have nothing inherent in their character to make them to differ from the non-elect. Wherever we imagine we can detect differences, we have to ask the question that Paul asked in **1 Corinthians 4:7**, "*For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*"

In this context, we must always remember what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:1-3**: "*And you hath he quickened, **who were dead in trespasses and sins**; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: **Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.***"

The grace of God does not search for persons who are willing to accept it, for no fallen, unregenerate human being is ever willing to accept the grace of God. The grace of God does not **find** persons willing, rather it **makes** them willing, for none would be willing otherwise. This is what Paul is trying to tell us in **Romans 9:15-16**: "*For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then **it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.***"

The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows: "*I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.' **So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it.***"

It should be borne in mind that the first part of this sentence is a quotation from the Old Testament - **Exodus 33:19** to be precise. This demonstrates that God has always acted on this principle.

Beloved ones, we are not elected to salvation because God **foresees** that we will believe, but because He **foreknows** that none will believe. We make bold to say that had it not been for the Election of God, the Lord Jesus Christ would have died in vain. As Augustine said: "Man is converted not because he wills to be, but he wills to be because he is ordained to election." There are persons who testify "I owe my election to my faith." My testimony is that "I owe my faith to my election."

Earlier in our study, we made the point that the doctrines of predestination and election are clearly set forth in the Word of God. We will now consider some passages which address the election of God.

GENESIS 18:17-19

"And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?"

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

The way in which the **King James Version** has rendered verse 19, gives the impression that God decided to reveal His plans relative to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah based on what He knew about Abraham's character. In the original, however, the Hebrew is rather explicit in conveying a slightly more complex meaning. The Hebrew actually says: "For I have known him **in order that** he may command," etc. The text is most explicit here: there is no ambiguity. The words **in order that**, appear in the original. Let us look at how the passage is rendered in five other translations:

COMPLETE JEWISH BIBLE

"Adonai said, 'Should I hide from Avraham what I am about to do, inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him? For I have made myself known to him, so that he will give orders to his children and to his household after him to keep the way of Adonai and to do what is right and just, so that Adonai may bring about for Avraham what he has promised him.'"

ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION

*"The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? **For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him** to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.'"*

NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION BIBLE

*"Then the Lord said, 'Should I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? After all, Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations on the earth will pronounce blessings on one another using his name. **I have chosen him so that he may command his children and his household after him** to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then the Lord will give to Abraham what he promised him.'"*

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

*"Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. **For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him** to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.'"*

NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

*"Should I hide my plan from Abraham?" the Lord asked. 'For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. **I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families** to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. Then I will do for Abraham all that I have promised.'"*

NEHEMIAH 9:7

*"Thou art the Lord the God, **who didst choose Abram**, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham."*

JEREMIAH 1:4-5

"Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

JOHN 15:15-16

"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

JOHN 17:6

*"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: **thine they were**, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word."*

ACTS 13:46-48

*"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.**"*

ROMANS 8:28-30

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-29

*"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: **But God hath chosen** the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; **and God hath chosen** the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, **hath God chosen**, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."*

EPHESIANS 1:3-5

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."

COLOSSIANS 3:12

*"Put on therefore, **as the elect of God**, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering."*

1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-4

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

2 THESSALONIANS 2:7-14

7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

*11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:
12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because
God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and
belief of the truth:
14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

*“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, **which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began**, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*

We will conclude this Lesson with an interesting passage from **Revelation 17:1-8**:

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

*8 The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, **whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

In the light of the angel revealed to John in verse **8**, it would seem reasonable for us to assume that there are persons whose names have been written in the book of life “*from the foundation of the world.*” Since the persons whose names were written in the book of life would not yet have been born when their names were written, then, it would also be reasonable to assume that they must have been elected by God for this wonderful privilege.

If it is the Lord’s will, in our next Lesson, we will examine some of these passages in detail. We shall see that they have a lot to tell us about the election of God.