

ELECTION, FREE-WILL, & GRACE TRUTH

PART 3

HOW PREDESTINATION, ELECTION, AND FREE-WILL LEAD TO GRACE TRUTH

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth"

2 Thess. 2:13 NKJV



Review of Study 2

The perfectly organized God planned for our salvation before creation. Because the word "chosen" is used in connection with salvation, we must not assume God chose certain people to be saved. Recall that Israel was God's chosen nation, yet most were unsaved. An analogy of mice in a maze indicates a mouse can make a free-will choice of which route to take. However, the outcome of that choice can still be predestined. Similarly, each of us has a choice as to whether we will believe in Christ or not, but the outcome of that choice has been already determined (predestined). The predetermined outcomes do not in any way preclude anyone from making a personal choice, indeed, making an independent, free-will choice is part of God's plan. God knew the only way in the Age of Grace to be saved was to be "in Christ" through faith.

BIBLE TRUTH

We will now consider God's eternal plan and purpose. Three relevant verses will be discussed (underlining and red were added to emphasis a word or phrase explained later). These three verses are taken from the Pauline Epistles, written specifically for the Age of Grace. The words "you and us" are referring to those who were already believers. Now Paul is explaining to those believers "how" they became saved, and this applies to us.

1. "...because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thes. 2:13b)

Paul is telling the believers their salvation was the result of being sanctified (set apart as holy). At first, this verse seems to say that God chose them to salvation, but this viewpoint is based upon picking just a phrase (chose you for salvation) and not trying to study the entire verse. As we study the entire verse, notice the Holy Spirit *and belief* are both involved in salvation. The whole verse

makes it obvious God did not choose the person, but the way of salvation, "**...chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth.**" He chose that salvation would result from (*through*) being set apart as holy.

The word *by* in the verse above, explains that sanctification results from two things, *by* the Spirit and belief. We are saved *through* sanctification; and we are sanctified *by* belief in the truth and *by* the work of the Holy Spirit. As a note of clarification, sanctification and salvation occur the moment of belief; this is not a drawn out process. The people Paul was addressing obviously were not saved by being chosen from the beginning of the world. He says belief is required, and they could not believe before they existed. Thus, salvation occurs upon belief, not by being chosen before creation.

Your Thoughts: God chose *how* people can be saved, not *who* would be saved. Discuss how this fits into the teaching that God want us all to be saved.

2. "**. . . who has 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**" (2 Tim. 1:9).

Paul told Timothy that God saves individuals and gives them a calling (a mission), according to his eternal purpose and grace. Having a purpose in place before time began in no way implies He chose any person. He chose the purpose and plan of salvation; the purpose and plan were assured to anyone who would believe. A grandparent can be an example of giving something good to someone before birth. A grandparent can give an unborn grandchild a fund of money for college. The grandchild is given this fund at the time the documents are signed (the child may not be born for many years), but the actual possession does not take place until the child reaches a specified age. The purpose of the grandparent becomes a reality when the grandchild receives the money and goes to college.

Like the grandparent above, God's purpose for salvation was confirmed before we were born. Thus, the blessings of God were assured from the beginning, for anyone who would later believe in Christ. His purpose and grace become reality in our lives when we believe. That was His goal; however, He had a lot of work to do to bring it all about (creation, death of Christ at the right time in history, establishing the Age of Grace, etc.). This verse reveals the purpose and plan of salvation were put in place before creation.

3. "**...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love**" (Eph. 1:4).

This verse was discussed in Lessons 32 and 33, and it is clear God did choose something before the foundation of the world. Again, people invariably read this phrase "He chose us," and assume this means God chose certain people. That interpretation is not at all what the entire verse is teaching. It teaches that before the world began, He chose that salvation would be based upon being *in Him*: "**He chose us in Him.**" The teaching of being *in Christ* is such a common teaching of Paul that it is hard to see how this is verse can be misunderstood. Paul teaches that those who trust in Christ are in Him, and those in Him are blessed with all spiritual blessings.

Your Thoughts: Some people will say confidently, "Well, I was chosen by God." Some display a sense of pride, but often cover that pride by mentioning how unworthy they are. When an unsaved person hears this kind of statement, what is he or she to think?

Individuals Were Not Chosen

The Word of God does not agree with those who believe certain individuals were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. "**Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh ... that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world, But now in Christ Jesus you who**

once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13). This verse clearly teaches the Ephesians (and each of us) were *without Christ* and *without hope* at a previous time in their lives. If they were without Christ and without hope, how could they have been chosen to salvation before creation? If they were chosen to salvation before the world began, then God would surely not say they had no hope, even if the people did not realize it at the time. Further proof comes from the last phrase "**But now in Christ...**," which indicates the believers' salvation was a recent event (now). Paul is saying that you who were far off have become, just recently, close to God.

You are familiar with this verse, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast**" (Eph. 2:8-9). This verse teaches that a person is saved by God's grace (unmerited kindness); all He asks from us is that we have faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, some people have twisted this verse to support a wrong view of salvation. The issue is, does the phrase, "**...and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works...**," refer to *saved* or *faith*? If this phrase refers to *faith*, then our faith is the gift of God; if it refers to *saved*, then salvation is the gift of God.

If the phrase refers to faith, that interpretation would be a Calvinistic view of God's selecting someone to be saved and then giving the person faith so it can happen. Such a viewpoint is supported only by twisting this verse to give the wrong conclusion. The verse is not teaching that faith is the gift of God. There are Greek linguistic reasons why this is not the case (not discussed here), and logical reasons. The phrase, "**...it is the gift of God, not of works...**," cannot refer to faith; no one in the Bible ever worked for faith. However, the Pauline Epistles are full of warnings against trying to work for salvation. So logically, the phrase refers back to the word *saved*, since Paul taught salvation is not by works (Titus 3:5; Rom. 3:20). Thus, salvation is the gift from God: it is not of

our doing or of our works. Salvation is through faith, which is a free-will choice to believe in Christ.

Note: Romans 9:11-13 is often used to support the view God elects individuals for salvation. These verses are clearly not teaching the election of individuals. The phrase, "**...that the purpose of God according to election might stand...**," supports the teaching in these lessons. God elected (chose) a purpose that would stand (be completed); the purpose related to nations not individuals. Most of the people in the resulting chosen nation, Israel, were not saved.

Grace's Triumph

The verses discussed above (2 Thes. 2:13; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9) teach that God selected the means (the way) of salvation before creation began. An alternative way of stating the previous sentence is, He predestined (pre-determined) the means by which anyone could be saved today. This was all part of His overall plan of redemption for mankind. God had a passionate desire (purpose), prepared in advance, made sure it was fair and just, and only then did He begin creation. For thousands of years, He worked out His redemptive plan. Finally, He offered His specific plan of salvation for the Age of Grace.

The plan of God for our Age is that He chose salvation to be based upon being in Christ. This is grace truth, and should be appreciated as part of the continuing unfolding of the mystery. To read a lot of other doctrinal beliefs into these verses diminishes their precious truth. Only after the mystery was revealed could His purpose for our Age take place. God directed history to achieve this exact purpose. In other ages, God's chosen means of salvation was different. People were chosen on the basis of faith and obedience, such as, believing God and following the Law of Moses. However, the believer's sins were never forgiven, only covered up (atoned) because animal sacrifices could never forgive sin, but God still saw them (Heb. 10:4-12). Forgiveness of sin comes only through Christ's death, the perfect Sacrifice.

Upon Christ's death, forgiveness of sin was finally possible. His blood was applied backward in time, meaning His blood was used by God to forgive all the sins of the past, which had been covered up (Rom. 3:25-26). Finally, the penalty of sin was put to death. Upon His death, all the sins of past ages were washed away when His blood was applied. Once this happened, the believers of the past were actually saved by Christ, since His death made their salvation possible.

Being "in Him" means being in Christ. The believer gets "in Him" by a special baptism—a spiritual baptism. This spiritual baptism places any person into Christ (I Cor. 12:13) when he or she believes in Him. Spiritual baptism is a new term to many; it is not water baptism. This baptism is a spiritual act performed by the Holy Spirit, making us one with Christ. Thus, when God looks upon

us, He sees Christ. Christ's life (death, burial, resurrection, and position in heaven) becomes ours because we are in Him. All He is, we become! This spiritual baptism identifies us with Christ, that is, we become one with Him. (Adults Studies 4 and 5 discuss spiritual baptism in detail.)

A Christian is a "Christ-in-person"

Your Thoughts: Spiritual baptism is a new idea to many people. The Holy Spirit performs this baptism for each believer the moment he or she believes. You cannot see it, feel it, and no bells or whistles go off when it happens. It is a silent operation by the Spirit, making a person one with Christ. Thus, when God looks at us, He sees us "in Christ." Discuss.

APPLICATION FOR US

The Reformation started by Luther continues, and for 500 years biblical truth has slowly been recovered (truths such as justification by faith, the mystery, significance of the Pauline Apostleship, Rapture...). There is still truth to be recovered in His Word, so we must be open to new understandings, while at the same time not subject to false ideas. What is presented in these lessons may be part of the recovery process, in full accordance with the truth of the mystery, the Word rightly discerned, and offering a realistic way to understand the Bible.

It is vitally important to understand God's purpose for today. Before creation began, God had a purpose in mind

and directed all creation and all history to that end. The purpose for the Age of Grace was that God chose the means of salvation to be based upon being "in Him." To be chosen in Him means Christ had to die, the mystery revealed (it had been kept a secret from humans and Satan), and the new Age revealed (Eph. 3:2-6; Col. 1:25-26). Only in our Age, with the indwelling Holy Spirit placing us into Christ, is it possible for this all to take place. By understanding this topic, we get a glimpse of God's wisdom from creation unto this day: **"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out"** (Rom. 11:33)!

TAKE TO HEART

Summary

God's desire has always been to save and to bless us. God always had a purpose in mind and directed all of history to that end. He worked it all out so that we could be saved. It is not consistent with biblical teaching to think God elected certain people for salvation. That incorrect belief is based upon picking incomplete phrases from the Bible. When entire verses are studied, the teaching is clear; He chose how salvation would occur. If He chose individuals, the issue of a fair, unbiased, and loving God comes into question. Instead of individuals, God did choose a plan of salvation for us all. Choosing the plan of salvation means that He predetermined how salvation would occur, and He did it before the world began. The plan of God for our Age bases salvation upon being in Christ, and being in Christ is a specific characteristic of our Age of Grace. When we believe in Christ, we are in Him.

Gospel

"...because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thes. 2:13b). God chose the plan of salvation and the outcomes of our faith. The plan He chose was to save us through the act of setting us apart as holy. The Holy Spirit sets us apart as holy when we believe in Christ. When we are set apart (sanctified), we are "in Him." All the almighty God asks from us is simple faith in Jesus Christ as our savior.

Encouragement

God wants everyone to be His, but the choice is yours. He is fair, just, and treats us all equally. You can belong to Him and have assurance of being secure and loved. You are loved by God, and He wants you for his own. Once you believe, you become a very special person; after all, you are in Christ and that is how God sees you. *At Grace 4 You*, we praise the Lord for your faith and desire to know Him. As His son or daughter, you are of great worth, so much so that one day you will judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

Endnote

Many other verses relate to this topic; two more will be briefly mentioned. The two verses come from the Gospels (which were before the Age of Grace began).

1. **"For many are called but few *are* chosen"** (Matt. 22:14). In this parable, the man not chosen was not wearing a wedding garment, that is, he was trying to get into the kingdom based upon his own self-righteousness. Everyone is invited (called) to receive salvation. Individuals are chosen for the kingdom based upon belief in Christ; then they are clothed in His righteousness.
2. **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..."** (Jn.15:16a). The believers (vs. 3) were chosen to bear fruit, they were not chosen to be saved. Once saved, bearing fruit brings glory to God and creates joy in the heart of the believer.