

EPHESIANS: GOD'S GLORY IN THE CHURCH (study 1)

Eternal Election

All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out ... And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing ... No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand ... JOHN 6:37,39,44; 10:29

Study 1a: The BASIS of ELECTION – GOD'S WILL (1:1-2)

"I WILL have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I WILL have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy ... He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ROMANS 9:15,16,18 (NAS)

Did Paul choose to be an Apostle? Or the Ephesians to be saints? (vv.5,9,11)

What could be more orderly than that the contemplation of the divine dealing with man should begin with a declaration of God's sovereignty in election? ... No

Does God want a Creator/creature relationship?

'and his servants ... will see His face ...' (REV. 22:3,4)

In His upper-room discourse, Christ uttered a phrase of seven monosyllables which sets forth the major two-fold characterization of the Christian -- "Ye in me, and I in you" (John 14:20). Judging from these seven words alone, how marvelous are the inexhaustible and unsearchable riches of divine grace, and yet how wonderful is the simplicity of the divine utterance! The second of these two relationships, stated in the words, "I in you," asserts the essential truth that the child of God has received a new impartation of life, which life is none other than the indwelling Christ. The fact of a new impartation of Christ's life should not be contemplated as a mere imitation of Christ, or a new rule or ideal of life; it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The Christian is one to whom Christ has given His own eternal life ... [Chafer 30]

If election is to holiness as the apostle here teaches, it follows, first, that individuals, and not communities or nations, are the objects of election; secondly, that holiness in no form can be the ground of election. If men are chosen to be holy, they cannot be chosen because they are holy. And, thirdly, it follows that holiness is the only evidence of election. For one who lives in sin to claim to be elected unto holiness, is a contradiction. [Hodge 35]

obligation rests upon God in the exercise of His grace. He may, and does, choose whom He will. He neither sees, nor foresees, any good in man which might form a basis of His blessings. Whatever good is found in redeemed man is wrought in him by divine grace. [Chafer 34]

Paul ... was not appointed to his office through the intervention of the church, or those who had been apostles before him; his call came direct from heaven ... The common conception is precisely the reverse of the truth ... it begins with a human volition instead of a Divine volition. It makes the act of consecration a human act instead of a Divine act. God's place becomes subordinate and secondary; He only accepts what we give. [Dale 11,19]



R.W. Dale

"Grace" and "peace", then, are key words of Ephesians. In 6:15 the good news is termed "the gospel of peace". In 2:14 it is written that Jesus Christ himself "is our peace", for first he "made peace" by his cross (verse 15) and then he "came and preached peace" to Jews and Gentiles alike (verse 17). Hence his people are to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3). "Grace", on the other hand, indicates both why and how God has taken his reconciling initiative. For "grace" is his free and undeserved mercy. It is "by grace" that we are saved, indeed by "the immeasurable riches of his grace" (2:5,7,8), and it is by the same grace that we are gifted for service (4:7; cf. 3:2,7). So if we want a concise summary of the good news which the whole letter announces, we could not find a better one than the three monosyllables "peace through grace". [Stott 27]

Study 1b: WHEN ELECTED? BEFORE CREATION (1 :3-4a)

What may we conclude from the Greek tenses in these verses?

In beginning the verse-by-verse contemplation of this Epistle, we shall find that the first section (Chapters II, and III) contains no word of exhortation as to the believer's daily life, nor is any mention made of the service which he should render to God. The section is characterized by the revelation of the boundless work of God in behalf of one who trusts in Christ. [Chafer 26]

This rhapsodic adoration is comparable to the overture of an opera which contains the successive melodies that are to follow. [John Mackay *God's Order: The Ephesian Letter and this Present Time* (1953) p.75]

The Spirit -- God's pledge of 'final purchase'

"Guarantee" here is *errebon*, originally a Hebrew word which seems to have come into Greek usage through Phoenician traders. It is used in modern Greek for an engagement ring. But in ancient commercial transactions it signified a "first instalment, deposit" down payment, pledge, that pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid" ... In this case the guarantee is not something separate from what it guarantees, but actually the first portion of it. An engagement ring promises marriage but is not itself a part of the marriage. A deposit on a house or in a hire-purchase agreement, however, is more than a guarantee of payment; it is itself the first instalment of the purchase price. So it is with the Holy Spirit. In giving him to us, God is not just promising us our final inheritance but actually giving us a foretaste of it, which, however, "is only a small fraction of the future endowment". [Stott 49]

As our idea of time arises from the perception of motion or consciousness of succession, the natural expression for eternity is "before time," before the existence of creatures who exist in time. Hence what has been from eternity is said in Scripture to have been before the world was, John 17, 24; 1 Pet. 1, 20; or before the ages, 1 Cor. 2, 7; 2 Tim. 1, 9 ... From eternity the whole scheme of redemption with all its details and in all its results lay matured in the divine mind. Hence everything is certain. There is no possibility either of failure or of any change of purpose. [Hodge 32]

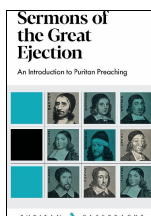
Scripture nowhere dispels the mystery of election, and we should beware of any who try to systematize it too precisely or rigidly. It is not likely that we shall discover a simple solution to a problem which has baffled the best brains of Christendom for centuries. [Stott 37]

Study 1c: The PURPOSE of ELECTION – PRAISE (1:6-14)

To whom is this hymn principally directed? (vv. 3,5,17; 3:14,20-21)

The glory of God is the manifested excellence of God, and the glory of any one of his attributes, is the manifestation of that attribute as an object of praise. The design of redemption, therefore, is to exhibit the grace of God in such a conspicuous manner as to fill all hearts with wonder and all lips with praise. [Hodge 38]

Yet such Christian talk comes into violent collision with the man-centredness and self-centredness of the world. Fallen man, imprisoned in his own little ego, has an almost boundless confidence in the power of his own will, and an almost insatiable appetite for the praise of his own glory. But the people of God have at least begun to be turned inside out. The new society has new values and new ideals. For God's people are God's possession who live by God's will and for God's glory. [Stott 50]



What qualities of God does Paul isolate for praise? (vv. 6,12,14)

O I beseech you, my brethren, every day spend some time thinking upon eternity. The serious thoughts of an eternal condition would be a great means to promote holiness ... The thoughts of eternity would make us slight and condemn all the things of this world. What is the world to him that has eternity always in his eyes? Did we think seriously and solemnly of eternity, we should never overvalue the comforts of the world, nor overgrieve at the crosses of the world. [Thomas Watson *Sermons of the Great Ejection* p.145]

Let me remind you that he was a prisoner in Rome. Not indeed in a cell or dungeon, but still under house arrest and handcuffed to a Roman soldier. Yet though his wrist was chained and his body was confined, his heart and mind inhabited eternity. He peered back "before the foundation of the world" (verse 4) and on to "the fullness of time" (verse 10), and grasped hold of what "we have" now (verse 7) and ought to "be" now (verse 4) in the light of those two eternities. As for us, how blinkered is our vision in comparison with his, how small is our mind, how narrow are our horizons. Easily and naturally we slip into a preoccupation with our own petty little affairs. But we need to see time in the light of eternity, and our present privileges and obligations in the light of our past election and future perfection. Then, if we shared the apostle's perspective, we would also share his praise. For doctrine leads to doxology as well as to duty. Life would become worship, and we would bless God constantly for having blessed us so richly in Christ. [Stott 44]

And we may measure the real force and depth of every religious Movement by the

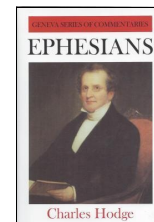
greatness of its conception of God. In century after century, in nation after nation, great religious impulses, which seemed at first to promise a complete and permanent ethical and religious reformation, have soon spent their strength because their conception of God was defective in some of its most necessary elements. [Dale 35]

Yet Who is the theme of Paul's "rhapsody"?

In the first fourteen verses of the Ephesian letter Jesus Christ is mentioned either by name or title ("Christ", "Jesus Christ", "Christ Jesus", "the Lord Jesus Christ", "the Beloved" or by pronoun or possessive ("he", "him", "his" no fewer than fifteen times. And the phrase "in Christ" or "in him" occurs eleven times. [Stott 34]

vv.13b-14 How has God given us a guarantee of our election in Christ? (Rom. 8:9-16)

There are several purposes for which a seal is used. 1. To authenticate or confirm as genuine and true. 2. To mark as one's property. 3. To render secure. In all these senses believers are sealed. They are authenticated as the true children of God; they have the witness within themselves, 1 John 5,10. Rom.8,16. 5,5. They are thus assured of their reconciliation and acceptance. They are moreover marked as belonging to God, Rev. 7, 3; that is, they are indicated to others, by the seal impressed upon them, as his chosen ones. And thirdly, they are sealed unto salvation; i.e. they are rendered certain of being saved. The sealing of God secures their safety. [Hodge 63]



The opening section of this Epistle (1:1-14), which carries the reader into both the eternity past and that which is to come, and which asserts the fact of sovereign, immutable, divine predestination, comes to its close with the mention of one more of the heavenly, spiritual blessings which accrue to the believer because of the fact that he is in Christ Jesus. As has been stated, the saved one is chosen in sovereign grace, predestinated in love, adopted into heaven-high privilege, redeemed, illuminated, made a partaker of Christ's inheritance, and finally, sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise. ... Though the doctrine of divine election presents difficulties which are insolvable by the finite mind, the fact of divine selection is not limited to God's choice of some out of the many for eternal glory; it is observable anywhere in the universe. There is a variety in all God's creation. There are classifications among the angels. One star is said to differ from another star in glory. Men are not born of the same race with the same advantages, nor with the same native abilities. These variations in the estates of men cannot be accounted for on the basis of the efficacy of the free will of man. Men do not choose their race, their life conditions (whether it be in civilization or in heathendom, nor do they choose their natural gifts. [Chafer 51,36]

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