

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 1:4-5 - Praise God for Predestination - Part 2

Last week we began working through this opening section of Ephesians and it really is a theological gold mine. The grace of God, the predestining work of God, the glory of God are all on full display here in this section.

And again I think it is worth pointing out that Paul doesn't hesitate to work through these issues. He's not ashamed of the gospel and he's not ashamed of the doctrine of predestination. It's cause for him to praise God. All doctrines we find in the Bible - Trinity, Incarnation, Atonement, Hell, Creation, Eschatology, Predestination - should all cause us to praise God and we should never be ashamed of them.

Definition: Predestination is the choice of God in eternity past to choose some for salvation and others for damnation, without regard to merit.

God chose who he chose for his own good pleasure without any regard to our works or choices.

Last week we saw that our response to predestination should be praise to the Father: blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. When it comes to this doctrine, our immediate response should always be praise to the Father.

We also saw the extent of predestination. When it comes to predestination, we're not just talking about who goes to heaven or who goes to hell. For the elect, God predestined us to enjoy every single spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He predestined us for an eternity of ever-increasing grace and kindness in his presence where there is fullness of joy.

When your parents plan out a birthday party, they don't just plan that you'll have a party. They plan the presents, the cake, the streamers, the games, dinner, everything. God has planned an eternity of grace.

And we saw the direction of predestination: That it was the Father who chose us. We didn't choose him; left to ourselves we would never choose God. He chose us and saved us.

When we see this doctrine in the Bible it is always God choosing us, never us choosing God. Is there a sense in which we choose God when we come to faith in Jesus? Yes, in a sense. But the Bible also tells us the only reason we chose Jesus is because God worked in us to transform us and implant in us the faith to believe.

This morning we're going to continue working through this section. There are 4 more aspects we'll look at.

4) Timeline of predestination. **Read 3-4a**

When did God predestine people for salvation? Part of our definition is the "choice of God in eternity past." Here Paul says "before the foundation of the world." What does that mean?

What the Bible teaches is that God created all things out of nothing. Before **Genesis 1:1**, before God said let there be light and created in 6 days, there was no other material. It was just God: Father, Son and Spirit living in perfect triune glory. That existence where there was only God before Genesis 1 we call eternity past.

I remember being in Bible college and thinking "Well, how long was it just God existing all by himself." You know what the answer is? Eternally. Before Genesis 1, there was no time. There was no material, no matter, no created beings, no angels, no nothing. Only God.

The Bible says from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. So because there was nothing but God prior to Genesis 1, we just call that eternity past.

Genesis 1 is when God began creating everything. The universe, the world, the animals, people, angels, spiritual beings. Genesis 1 is when he founded the earth. So when did he choose us? **Read 4**

We were chosen by God before the founding of the world. Before God ever said "Let there be light" he had already chosen who would be saved and who wouldn't. That's why we call this the eternal plan of God. This

isn't something he's just making up on the fly. He's not adding to the list over time. He's not choosing you because you chose him.

No, before ever there was a creation he chose us in Christ. **Turn to Titus 1:1-3.** We see these same things taught here in the opening chapters of Titus. Again, Paul is not being coy with this doctrine. It's out front for all to see. **Read 1-3**

Paul was made an apostle why? For the sake of the faith of God's elect. Paul wasn't just a do-gooder out healing people and making them happy. He wasn't just preaching for preaching's sake. He was specifically called and chosen by God to bring the elect to salvation.

That salvation was promised **Vs. 2** says before the ages began. Or literally, before times eternal. Before time began. What about that promise? Who promised what? And when?

Well, when we connect the dots throughout the NT the promise was made from the Father to the Son to give him a people he would redeem. We call this the Covenant of Redemption. In eternity past - before times eternal - the Father promised to the Son that he would give to him a redeemed humanity that would praise him and worship him.

If you are a Christian you're part of a great eternal promise from the Father to the Son. Salvation is not just about you escaping hell and going to heaven. It's about you being part of a promise the Father made to the Son in eternity past to give you to his Son to praise him forever for his sacrifice for you. So when we gather on Sunday mornings to sing the praises of Jesus or when we worship Jesus in our life at any time, we are fulfilling this promise from the Father to the Son.

Over and over Jesus, praying to the Father in **John 17**, says that the Father gave him the people he died to save.

"You gave them to me. Yours they were and you gave them to me. Everything you have given me is from you...I don't pray for the world, I pray for those you gave me, for they are yours." **John 17:6-9**

He's talking about the disciples. And all future disciples. That giving of people to the Son is this promise that God made in eternity past. You guys, our salvation is part of something so much bigger than ourselves. **Turn to Rev. 13:5-8**

This is talking about the Beast, the agent of Satan that makes war on the saints. I'll skip the eschatological discussion for now, but notice it makes war on the saints. **Read 5-8**

When was your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life? Before the foundation of the world.

There are people who want to say that God didn't choose individual people. He just chose the church. He just chooses that salvation is available. And if you believe in Jesus then you're part of the church.

It's like saying God chose that there would be a potluck. He didn't choose who would show up to the potluck. He invites everyone to the potluck so if you chose to eat at the potluck - good on you - and now you're part of the party.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. What's written in that Lamb's book of Life? Names. If you are in Christ, your name was written by God in a book in eternity past. Who's book? The Lamb's book. You are in a book that belongs to Jesus. It's a book filled with names written down by the Father that the Son would go and redeem. Jesus is the lamb because he shed his blood to purchase you. Why? Because your name is in the book.

Several chapters later John again says that the enemies of God are those whose names haven't been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

Your election to salvation is eternal because it is grounded in the eternal promise of the Father to the Son to redeem a people whose names are written in the book of life. **Let's turn back to Eph 1.**

So the timeline of predestination is eternal.

5) Let's talk about the morality of predestination. Does the doctrine of predestination have moral implications for us? Does it change how we live? **Read 4**

When God chose you, he chose you to be holy and blameless. When God wrote your name in the book of life, he didn't have different categories of people: we got the goody two-shoes here, we got the party animals here, we got posers, we've got people who mostly have their act together.

No, there's only one column in the book of life: Holy and Blameless. And I think this is true in two ways. First, he has made you holy and blameless through faith in Jesus. We'll never be perfectly holy and blameless on our own - it's only through the imputed righteousness of Christ that we are truly holy and blameless.

Look at Eph. 2:8-10. I know we'll get here, but again notice the connection between predestination of God and our lives. **Read 8-10**

We are God's creation, created in Christ for what? Good works. That's what he saved us for. And every good work you do, God prepared beforehand for us to walk in them.

Every good work that you've ever done in the name of Jesus for the glory of God is a work that God had already prepared beforehand for you to do. When did he prepare that? Well, it wasn't last Tuesday. It wasn't the Tuesday before that. It was before time began.

Predestination doesn't mean we can do whatever we want. No, if you're predestined you have been called into a life of holiness and godliness. **Look at Col. 3:5-17**

This whole section is called the put-off/put-on section. As Christians, we are called to put off our sin. Like taking off old dirty clothes, and put on obedience, like new clean clothes. Look at what Paul says why we do this. **Read 5-17**

Did you notice verse 12? Because we are God's chosen ones, because we are holy through the imputation of Christ's righteousness and we're beloved by the Father and by the Son, we put on holy living.

There's a lot of people who want to take the doctrine of predestination and make it into some kind of secular fatalism. Fatalism says that since everything is determined nothing matters. The die is cast and what are we going to do? Live however you want.

The problem with that is no one actually lives like fatalism is true. Or the ones who do end up committing suicide and dying of severe depression. No, the biblical view is that God's preordination of all things gives us hope and encouragement and joy to walk in the very things he has planned out for us.

Whenever I go out of town - for as long as I can remember - my kids have drawn little pictures for me with notes on them and hidden them in my bags. And when I'm away I find them when I get out a new shirt or grab a pair of socks. They were put there on purpose that I would find them.

Now when I find these little notes I don't feel a sense of fatalism "Well, that's not special - I was gonna find it anyway because that's what they planned." No.

The fact that I find them and realize that they thought about blessing me long before my trip actually adds to the blessing and sweetness of the notes.

The same is true with this doctrine. The result isn't that your life doesn't matter. It's that God, in his infinite grace and wisdom, has sovereignly orchestrated your life in such a way that as you live and obey him you're opening up all the things he planned for you anyway.

You were chosen to live a holy life. You were predestined to walk in righteousness. We even read it before in **Titus 1**: Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness.

Those who have been chosen by God, saved by the Spirit, loved by Jesus, are those whose lives now accord with godliness.

There's no one who is chosen to live a life of rampant sinfulness. There's no one God elected to be workers of lawlessness. God's election in Christ always results in godly living.

Some people want to say "Well, if you believe God just chooses people Then they can do whatever they want." That's not true. It's a complete distortion of the truth that God chose us to be blameless and to live blameless lives. **Turn to Rom. 8:28-30**

This little passage is often called the Golden Chain of Redemption. It's a chain because it describes the order of salvation. One part links to the next, links to the next. What begins in foreknowledge ends in glorification. There are 5 links in the chain.

It's golden because it gives us precious truths. But notice the relationship between being chosen and morality. **Read 28-30**

So because God is sovereign, all things - even evil and bad things - work together for good. But that's only true if you're a believer. But what were we predestined for in **Vs. 29?** To be conformed to the image of the Son.

To be like him in holiness and godliness. Now that won't be complete until the day we stand before Jesus in glory but nonetheless this is what God has predestined us into. Everywhere we see predestination and morality is mentioned, it is always that we are called to holiness.

Now, while we're here, just a quick note on the word "foreknowledge" - do you see that in **verse 29?** The Golden Chain here begins in foreknowledge, then predestination, then calling - where God at some point in our life God calls us into salvation. Then justification where we are declared to be righteous and then glorification where we are free from all sin with Jesus forever.

But what about foreknowledge? What does that mean? Some people will point to this verse and say "See, God foreknew that you would believe in him and so then predestined you." They would point to this passage to say predestination happens because God looks into the future to see what you'll do and predestines you based on your decision.

Not so fast. The word foreknowledge can mean mean to know **things** beforehand. But when it's used like that it's always **people** foreknowing: the Jews knew beforehand who Paul was; and the people Peter was writing to knew beforehand to watch out for false teachers.

But when God is doing the fore knowing it means "to enter into a relationship to." Which makes sense because oftentimes the Bible uses the word "knowledge" to mean relationship. Husbands and wives know each other - they're in a covenant relationship.

God knows who are his. It's not just information, it's a relationship with his people.

And interestingly here, it can't be referring to knowledge because it says God only foreknows some people. If it's knowledge of everyone's actions then God would foreknow all people. But those whom he foreknew - only the ones whom he foreknew - are the ones he predestined.

See, when God foreknows it's not referring to God ***knowing things***, it's referring to God ***knowing people***. Knowing them in a loving, covenant relationship.

Notice that God doesn't foreknow things or actions, he foreknows people: "For ***those*** whom he foreknew." It's the people he knows, not their actions. What does it mean to foreknow someone? It means to love them with a covenant love.

It's kind of like how a pregnant mom loves her child before she even has met the child. She's predisposed to love her baby and therefore acts on the child's behalf. That's the idea.

Rom. 11:2: says of Israel: God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

It's not just that God knew about Israel, he loved Israel, despite all of their wickedness. And although not all will be saved, the ones he has foreknown will be.

1 Pet. 1:20: Peter says that Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world.

It's not that God knew what Jesus was going to do. The issue is that Jesus was infinitely loved by the Father from eternity past.

Acts 2:23: Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

God didn't just know Jesus would die. God, in his love, deliberately planned the crucifixion of his Son at the hands of lawless men to redeem his elect and bring his Son glory.

In eternity past God foreknew you - he set his covenant love on you - and therefore he predestined you. And in his covenant love he is conforming you to the image of the Son; he is working in you to make you holy and blameless. **Turn back to Eph 1.**

So we have the timeline of predestination and the morality of predestination.

6) Next we have the heart of predestination. What was the motivating factor of God's predestining work? This ties into that covenant love of foreknowledge. **Read 4-5**

Why did God predestine you? Because God loved you. Therefore he predestined you.

That's what that phrase means: In love. Or "out of his love for you" or "according to his love for you"...God predestined you. Or as Paul said in Romans: because of his foreknowledge of you, he predestined you.

This is pretty shocking to some people. There's a lot of people who say that predestination isn't loving at all. That it's a doctrine of hatred and deception. Because God hates those who are going to hell and doesn't choose them for heaven. Or that he's not being honest when he offers salvation for all people but only the elect will believe.

Listen, none of us deserve salvation. None of us deserve God's love. All of us deserve God's wrath - that's what **2:1-3** says. **Read**

Every single person - even the elect before we were saved - were under the wrath of God. Why? Because we were disobedient and children of Satan. That's the good and right attitude of a holy God.

What about people who will never believe? They're just doing what they want to do. Unbelievers love to hate God. They love to hate God. There's no unbeliever out there who genuinely just really, really wants to love Jesus in the purity of their heart.

How do I know that? Because that's what Jesus says.

John 3:19-20: And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Everyone who does evil things loves that they're doing evil things. Then how do people end up coming to the light? Glad you asked: Jesus answers that in the next verse: But whoever does what is true comes to the light - listen - so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

God does not unjustly send people to hell. Every person who rejects Jesus loves that they reject Jesus because they love their sin. God would be just to send us all to the abyss.

But because of God's great love, he predestines some to adoption.

Listen, everything about the act of salvation is an extension of God's love. For God so loved the world that he sent his Son. And For God so loved you, he chose you in Christ for adoption.

Look back at Rom 8:31-39. I know we're flipping back and forth here but I really want you to get this: this doctrine is really the depths of the love of God. So we just read the Golden Chain - foreknowledge, predestination, justification, calling, glorification. Then what does Paul talk about next? God's love. **Read 31-39**

What do we say to the doctrine of predestination? That God loves us. He'll never condemn us, no one will separate him from us. Even if we die we won't be separated from God's love. Then Paul launches into a 3 chapter discussion on this topic based on that love. And the famous line about Jacob and Esau: As it is written: Jacob I loved but Esau I hated.

God rightly hated Esau. What's amazing is that he actually loved Jacob.

Listen, you're a Christian and you were predestined for glory for just one reason: God loves you. And that love will never, ever leave you.

Alright, last point for this morning back in **Eph. 1**.

We've got the timeline of predestination, the morality of predestination, the heart of predestination.

7) Finally, this morning, we have the glory of predestination.

Last week, our first point was that the responses to predestination is praise. And specifically we praise the Father. But I want to key in on something that's throughout this passage that might be easy to overlook. But I think it's important. What specifically about the Father are we praising? Let me read and see if you can find it. **Read 5-6, 12, 14**

When we think of praising the Father because he loved us and predestined us, what specifically are we praising? We are praising his glory. Paul mentions the glory of God 3 times in this section. Once is specifically the glory of his grace.

What does that phrase mean "to the praise of his glory?" When we praise God's glory, what is it, exactly that we're praising?

Think of it this way. Imagine a star player on a sports team. They get all the glory. When they get all the glory what are they getting? They're getting all the praise and attention and credit for what they've done. . People are cheering them for their skills and ability that has carried the day.

The same is true with God. When we praise his glory we are praising his greatness, his grandeur, his awesome power and wisdom to do whatever he wants to do. That is what it is to be God. God can do whatever he wants to do.

See, this is the ultimate purpose in all that God does is to bring himself glory.

So watch how this works: in eternity past God made a promise to the Son. The Son would redeem people from their sin and give them eternal life. The people would then honor and glorify the Son for his work in salvation. The Spirit would fill them and empower them to praise the Son. And the end result of us praising Jesus for his work in saving us is that the Father receives glory - he receives credit and praise for planning and doing all these things.

From eternity past what God has set out to do is bring glory to himself. To bring himself praise and honor. In the grand scheme of things, in the grand scheme of eternity all of creation and redemption are to do one thing: cause us to praise God for how amazingly great he is.

And that can sound really unusual because it's sinful for us to do that. It's sinful for us to seek our own glory.

If we've got a kid who wants to go play soccer and we ask them why they want to play soccer, imagine if they say 'I just want people to praise me for how amazing I am at soccer. I want to hear them sing songs about me and fall down at my feet and worship me for my soccer abilities. I want people who follow me no matter where I go and honor me.'

We'd think that maybe they had a problem. And what often happens is that we think since it's wrong for us to think that way, it's wrong for God to think that way. But it's not.

Everything God does is so that he is praised. He is the glorious one. And in predestination, ultimately he gets all the glory. All the credit, all the praise, all the honor. Because he has done it all.

Pray