

Ephesians 1:1-14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, who are believers in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. He did this when he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves. In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight. He made known to us the mystery of his will in keeping with his good purpose, which he planned in Christ. This was to be carried out when the time had fully come, in order to bring all things together in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have also obtained an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in keeping with the purpose of his will. He did this so that his glory would be praised as a result of us, who were the first to hope in Christ. In him, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and in him, when you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of God's own possession, so that his glory would be praised.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Looking out the window of an airplane, you get a bird's-eye view of things. Today we're starting a sermon series on the New Testament book of Ephesians, and we'll learn how this letter by the Apostle Paul provides a **God's-eye view of things**. With the book of Ephesians, we'll soar into God's mind and learn what he sees. This God's-eye view will allow us to see the past and the future. It gives us a good look at what sinful humans can't normally see: the truth about spirituality. Today we get **A God's-eye View of Election**.

This Bible teaching of election is that God elected or chose those who would spend eternity with him in heaven. This is how Paul puts it in our text: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will”** (Ephesians 1:3-5).

Before God created water and oxygen, before he made pine trees and palm trees, even before he created light, God thought about the people he would make and knew they would fall into sin. Adam and Eve and every sinner like us should have to spend an eternity in hell for this mess. But God didn't want that. So, he planned to send his Son to save sinners. Not only that, but God also chose those who would come to believe in Jesus. This doctrine of election brings great comfort. We'll see how when we get a God's-eye view of things.

The biggest question connected with election is of course, “Am I one of the elect?” Paul was certain that he had been chosen in eternity by God and he was certain of this for his readers. Did he have a list of God's elect? No. But he did have a description of the elect. He said that the elect are holy and blameless in God's sight.

OK. So how could Paul be certain that he was one of the elect? Before he had become a Christian, he had persecuted believers and was responsible for many deaths. Our actions may not be as violent as Paul's once were, but our thoughts are often of violence. Who hasn't wanted to key the car of the guy who took your parking spot and then smirked about it? Who hasn't dreamed of silencing a sibling with a well-placed punch or slap? Although my actions might never be given a PG rating because they are not violent, they could be at least rated “P” for “phony.” Sure, I'm good at acting like a nice guy, but my thoughts about other people don't often match my “happy” and “polite” actions towards them.

So how in the world was Paul certain that he was one of the elect? And how can we ever be certain of this? Look carefully again at our text and note how Paul did not say that God chose the elect BECAUSE they were holy and blameless. No. He chose the elect TO BE holy and blameless. And that's exactly what God has declared us to be **“in Christ.”** Think back to the children's message. How is it possible to even think of tackling the job of cleaning the bin filled with rotting fruits and vegetables that stinks so. Only after you've put on a pair of cleaning gloves. Well, when God looked at the bin of humanity, he didn't see a single person who wasn't

rotten with sin. The only way the holy God could pick us up without disgust is if he did so **“in Christ”**. Jesus became a like a pair of gloves with which the Father picked us up so that he could wash us off and then hold us close to his chest the way you love to hold a baby.

So the key to knowing whether or not you are one of the elect is to ask yourself this simple question. “Am I *in Jesus*? Have I confessed to him my sins, and thrown myself on his mercy? Do I believe that Jesus has cleansed me of all my sins with his blood?” If so, then you must be one of the elect because there is no way you would entrust yourself to Jesus unless God first had chosen you to do so. What’s more the elect have also received the Holy Spirit as a deposit to assure that they are one of the elect. Listen to this: **“When you also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance”** (Eph. 1:13, 14a).

Whenever you go to sports game, you’ll need a ticket to prove that you or someone else paid the entrance fee. That ticket is a guarantee that when you get to the gates, they’ll let you in. Well, the Holy Spirit is the “ticket” that God has given to assure us that when we get to the gates of heaven, we’ll gain entrance. And although we can’t see the Holy Spirit like we can see a ticket, God says that we received him at our baptism. So when you’re wondering whether or not you’re one of the elect, the best place to look for confirmation is to your baptism.

That isn’t to say of course that all who are baptized automatically go to heaven. If someone gives me a ticket to a Diamondback’ game but I carelessly toss it aside because I think it will be easier for me to talk my way into the game, I will only have myself to blame when I’m left sitting outside in the heat because I was refused entrance for not having a ticket. In the same way, you can’t talk your way into heaven. No, you can only get there with the Holy Spirit and with Jesus.

OK, so God chose us in eternity to be his children. He made that choice known in time when he brought us to faith in Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. But *why* did God choose us? Did he choose us because he saw that we would be people worth having in his kingdom? Not at all. Listen again to Paul’s words from our text: **“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. He did this in accordance with the good purpose of his will, and for the praise of his glorious grace, which he has graciously given us in the one he loves. In him we also have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in keeping with the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us”** (Ephesians 1:4b-8a).

God chose us not because we deserved it; he chose us because he felt like it. He chose us because he is gracious. In other words, there is nothing we can do to earn salvation—it totally depends on God. And I’m glad it does! If it depended on me in any way, I’d spend a lifetime worrying about whether or not I had done what I needed to do to make it to heaven. Praise God for the doctrine of election, it affirms his timeless grace assuring us that our eternal future is firmly in his hands.

But it’s not just our future which is firmly in God’s hands, so is the present. That’s even true if you’re undergoing difficulty. The death of a loved one, terrible sickness, financial difficulty, a tough job...none of those things can rewrite the last chapter of God’s plan for his elect. Therefore, the doctrine of election makes Christians into optimists as they know that everything now will work out for their eternal good. Paul demonstrated such optimism when he wrote in our text: **“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.”** (Ephesians 1:3).

Did you know that Paul wrote these words of praise while he was imprisoned in Rome waiting to hear whether or not Caesar would condemn him to death? I doubt Paul enjoyed being in prison, but it wasn’t the end of the world for him. As one of God’s elect, he knew that God would use that imprisonment for Paul’s own good and for the good of others. And that’s why he could start off his letter to the Ephesians with those words of praise for his God. Likewise, you can start off every email and every conversation with such words of praise, even if your arthritis is acting up, or your job security isn’t looking so great. Your health will fail, and you may lose your job, but one thing Satan can never take from you is your salvation. That is firmly in God’s hand.

We started this sermon by speaking about how the letter to the Ephesians will give us a God’s-eye view of spiritual matters. Well, with the first fourteen verses we’ve been given a view of what God was up to before he created the world: he was choosing us to be part of his family. We’ve also been given an understanding of why he chose us: because he felt like it. And we’ve also learned where we should turn when we’re unsure about where we’ll spend eternity: we’ll run to Jesus. For in Jesus, and only in Jesus we have forgiveness and therefore have been declared holy and blameless in God’s eyes. Cherish this doctrine of election because it does bring comfort. Amen.