

## Chosen by God for Holiness, Adoption, and the Glory of God **Ephesians 1:4-6**

Sermon preached by Rev. Chris Roberts

Sunday, January 25th, morning service at Immanuel Baptist Church in Panama City, Florida

This morning we resume our series in Ephesians with **Ephesians 1:4-6**. Last time we tackled **verse 3** which introduced a section of praise that continues through **verse 14** with Paul showing his gratitude to God for his magnificent gifts to people, especially the gift of salvation.

In **verse 3** Paul was fairly vague about his reason for praise, referring only to our receiving *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*. In **verses 4-6** Paul begins to get more specific. He is presenting deep theology in these verses but he is not arguing for it. He assumes his readers are already on the same page and would join him in praising God for these gifts.

### **Ephesians 1:4-6**

Before we move on in this passage I want to lay my cards on the table. I told you at the beginning of this series that as we moved through Ephesians we would encounter some passages that may be controversial. This is one of those passages. The issue often raised from these verses is known as Calvinism, the belief that God chooses those who will be saved. As we move through these verses I won't make you guess my position. I am a Calvinist. Let me mention that my notes for this sermon are longer than what you will hear. If I preached all of my notes we really would be here all day. There is much I want to say that I will not say for the sake of time. I would encourage you to get my manuscript from our church website to see the pieces not presented today. It should be online sometime tomorrow.

Let me give you a quick overview of my history with Calvinism.

I was raised in a Presbyterian church, a denomination rooted in Calvinist theology. When I became a Southern Baptist the issue was Baptism, not Calvinism. Over time, though, I shifted away from Calvinism and even grew quite hostile toward it. But over the last year or so I have started to shift back. About five months ago I once more identified myself as a Calvinist.

What started my shift back toward Calvinism was a growing struggle with how to reconcile certain passages. I saw passages like **John 6:44** which would seem to affirm Calvinism. I also saw passages like **1 Peter 3:9** that speak highly of God's desire that all people be saved. One of my seminary professors said it is not possible to fully reconcile these passages. You have to focus on one set and spend less time with the other set. He believed passages like this were irreconcilable. As a non-Calvinist, this was at first comforting but it soon became a challenge. What would it mean to say parts of the Bible could not be seen as consistent with each other?

On the specific issue mentioned above what helped me was the view of two wills in God. God has a general will for all humanity, what he sees as desirable, but he has a greater will which he *will* bring to pass. I cannot go into much detail here, but to learn more about this view read John Piper's *Are There Two Wills in God?* at [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1580\\_Are\\_There\\_Two\\_Wills\\_in\\_God/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1580_Are_There_Two_Wills_in_God/)

The more I studied Calvinism the more I began to see that a Calvinist interpretation of Scripture helped me make sense of the whole Bible where a non-Calvinist interpretation only made sense of bits and pieces. John 6:37-40, 44 made absolutely no sense to me as a non-Calvinist, now it makes sense. Romans 9 just about drove me up the wall, now I begin to understand what Paul was saying. So over time I reaffirmed Calvinism.

It is with a degree of fear that I confess my Calvinism because many people today are openly hostile toward Calvinist theology. One problem is that what many people think of as Calvinism is actually a caricature, a distorted image of the real thing. I hope that by now you know me well enough to know that I am not the caricature.

The term Calvinism helps to identify a way of understanding the Bible. We are Baptists in part because we have a particular way of understanding the Bible's teachings on baptism. I am a Calvinist in part because I have a particular understanding of what the Bible says about salvation. Calvinism does not describe what I believe about man's philosophy, it helps describe what I believe the Word of God says.

To briefly describe one criticism of Calvinism, many people accuse it of being anti-evangelistic. Calvinists don't do evangelism! If anyone would like to accuse me of that, I welcome you to join me at the church February 02 when we restart our outreach program. I did not plan for this, but it is fitting that we announce our renewed outreach program the same Sunday that I preach this particular sermon. Looking back in the history of the church we can see this accusation cannot hold up. Jonathan Edwards, the great Puritan pastor, was as thorough a Calvinist as you could find. And yet Jonathan Edwards is widely credited for contributing to the great revival known as the Great Awakening. Edwards led countless souls to the Lord. Charles Spurgeon, considered by many to be one of the greatest Baptist preachers of all time, was highly evangelistic, wasting no opportunity to spread the gospel. William Carey, a man you have heard me describe as the father of the modern mission's movement, was another Calvinist. What we think of as the modern Baptist missionary effort was started by William Carey.

More could be said to present and defend Calvinism, but Calvinism itself is not the topic of today's sermon. Today's sermon is on **Ephesians 1:4-6**, but I wanted you to know my theological position when I approach this passage.

There are three primary points in this passage: (1) The nature of God's choosing; (2) The agent of God's choosing; and (3) The purpose of God's choosing.

First, the nature of God's choosing. Paul tells us four things about this choice: God is the one who chooses us; God chose us before the foundation of the world; God chose us with some specific purposes in mind for us; and God chose us according to the purpose of his will.

God did the choosing. Paul specifically says in **verse 4** *he chose us*. This is the choice of who would be saved. God chooses specific individuals who would be made holy, be adopted into God's family, and be able to glorify God. This choosing was entirely God's work and at God's initiative.

We have another example in Scripture of God's initiative to choose people for himself, though there are some differences. In the Old Testament God chose the nation of Israel. Listen to how this is described in **Deuteronomy 7:6-7**: *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples.*

The difference is that in the Old Testament God was choosing a nation to lay a foundation for the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament we see that God has also singled out specific individuals to receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

Most non-Calvinists, which would include most Baptists, tend to advocate what is called the foreknowledge view of predestination which says that God does choose specific individuals for salvation, but he chooses individuals that he knows will accept him. In other words, God knows whether or not you would someday receive his offer of salvation. If he sees that you will receive salvation, he includes you among the chosen. I believe there are several problems with this view. As far as this passage goes, the emphasis throughout is on the work God does. Nowhere is there a hint that God's choosing us is based on something we ourselves do.

Consider the words of Jesus in **John 15:16**: *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* Ultimately we do not know why God chooses who he chooses. He has reasons. It is not random. But his reasons are not based on human merit or whether or not humans might on their own choose God. We cannot choose him unless he has first chosen us.

The second thing about God's choice is that *he chose us... before the foundation of the world*. This again emphasizes that his choice is not based on anything we might do. *before the foundation of the world* means before creation, before any *let there be* had yet been spoken. What would this verse mean if not that God's choice has nothing to do with our actions? Compare this to **Romans 9:10-12**: *And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because*

of him who calls— she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” In that passage Paul is talking about this very issue and he demonstrates to his readers that God’s choice of us has nothing to do with anything we might do. Jacob and Esau had not done anything and yet God chose one over the other. Yes, God knew what actions they would eventually perform. But the point of the passage is that God’s choice was not because of their actions.

The third thing about God’s choice is that he chose us with specific purposes in mind for us. The passage reveals three things God will do with those he chooses: make us holy, adopt us, and be glorified through us. I want to put off for a moment looking at these in detail. First let’s look at one thing Paul says in **verse 5**: *he predestined us*. The *he* there is God the Father.

Predestined is a combination of *pre-* meaning before and *destine* meaning to determine or ordain. Before we ever existed God determined something about those whom he had chosen. This makes its success a certainty. That which God determines, will come about. Specifically, God determined that certain individuals would be made holy, would be adopted, and would glorify God. In other words, he determined that certain individuals would be saved. They were not predestined to have their own choice in the matter. They were not predestined because he knew they would choose him. They were predestined to choose him. Responding to those who hold the foreknowledge view of predestination, James Montgomery Boice said: “*an election like that [foreknowledge] is not really election. In such a reconstruction God does not preordain an individual to anything; the individual actually ordains himself.*” For predestination to have any kind of meaning it has to be God’s act toward man, not God’s act in response to man.

The fourth thing about God’s choice is found in **verse 5**: he chose us *according to the purpose of his will*. This gives an additional emphasis that God is the one who initiates man’s salvation. It is God who chooses and he does so according to the purpose of his will, not according to the purpose of your will or my will.

People often have two great struggles with Calvinism. First they ask why God chooses some and not others. Why doesn’t he choose everyone? Second they wrestle with the implication of Calvinism on man’s free will. What does it mean to say that God chose me rather than I choose God? I wish I had time to address both of these questions in detail. See the manuscript for more. Briefly, you can read **Romans 9:6-24** to find Paul’s answer to why God saves some and not others. On the second question, man’s will is always subservient to God’s will. We would all agree with this. We cannot do anything God does not allow. If God says something *will not* happen, it doesn’t matter how much we want it to happen. If God says something *will* happen, nothing we do will stop it. So we already recognize there are limitations to man’s free will. Limitations also exist in the area of salvation. Much more could and should be said but time does not permit. We will see more about this, though, once we get to **chapter 2**.

Why doesn’t God save all people? For some reason God determines it the best state of things that not all people be saved. The non-Calvinist believes God desires man’s free choice more than he desires man’s salvation. It is more valuable to God that man be free to choose than

that man be certainly saved. For the Calvinist God desires his glory more than anything else. It is more valuable to God that he be glorified than that all be saved. But how is God glorified when some people are not saved?

The answer is found in **Romans 9** but it is not an answer most people like and has led some people to call Calvinism despicable, evil, immoral. But the answer is only that which we find in the Bible. The key passage is **Romans 9:18-23**: *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...*

God seeks his glory above anything else. His glory is essentially the highlighting and drawing attention to the fullness of his character and nature. He is glorified when attention is drawn to his attributes. He is glorified when a sinner is saved in a great display of God's grace and mercy. He is glorified when Christians live a holy life and reflect the holiness of God. And he is glorified when sinners are sentenced to Hell, displaying his justice and might. What! How it be just for God to use humans as objects for his glory? He is the potter, you are the clay. And what right, Paul says, does the clay have to accuse the potter of anything? So he chooses to save some for salvation and chooses to leave the rest to suffer their just fate. Make no mistake, the judgment they face is for sins they freely committed. They are judged and condemned for willful rebellion against God. We are saved when God overcomes our willfulness and brings us to himself.

What about free will? Scripture tells us time and again that left to himself man will choose only to sin. Free will would result in no salvation. **Romans 3:10-12** says: *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* No one seeks God. No one would accept an offer of salvation. The only way for anyone to be saved is for God to override individual will and do something to change the individual so that he or she is now able to choose to seek God. Historic Arminians agree that left to themselves no one seeks God, but they believe God has enabled all people to seek him. This is called prevenient grace: the notion that God has raised people out of total depravity just far enough that people are now able to seek God. This idea would have merit if it were found in Scripture but it is nowhere present in the Bible. Salvation comes only when God overrides sinful, rebellious human will and regenerates people, giving us a new heart that will have faith in him.

So we have seen the first point in the passage, the nature of God's choosing. Next we look at the agent of God's choosing. This is revealed a few times. **Verse 4**, *he chose us in him*; **verse 5** *adoption through Jesus Christ*; **verse 6** *he has blessed us in the Beloved*. Salvation is

through Jesus Christ and no other. Holiness, only in Christ. Glorify God, only in Christ. Adopted to be a child of God, only in Christ. One thing this tells us is that even if a person could live a perfect, sin-free life, they would still need Jesus. But there are no sinless people. How desperate is our need for Christ. Only in him can our soul find its true purpose! Life with the Father! God has chosen that those he would save would be saved through Jesus Christ.

The interchange in **John 6** is important for understanding the relationship between the Father's choosing and the Son's saving. In **John 6:44** Jesus says, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*" Shortly before this **John 6:37** says, *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.* The first verse informs us that only those drawn to Jesus by the Father are able to go to Jesus. No one can approach Jesus unless the Father has drawn him. One might argue that the Father draws everyone, and individuals must choose whether or not to respond to being drawn. The problem is the rest of **verse 44** and **verse 37**. These show that the ones drawn by the Father *will* be saved. All those drawn will go to Christ. All those drawn will be raised up. **John 6:39** shows Jesus' purpose in this: *And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.* Everyone chosen by the Father and led to the Son will be kept by the Son, never lost, and experience the final resurrection in him. Unless we are universalists who believe everyone will be saved we must admit that this passage shows that God chooses who will be saved, and all those chosen are in fact saved.

We have seen the nature of God's choosing and the agent of God's choosing, now we return to the purpose of God's choosing. There are three things revealed. We are chosen to be made holy and blameless; to be adopted; and to glorify God.

Salvation has to mean something. Being born again means something. We are not saved to sit around living like the world! God's intention for us when he chose us was that we be holy. Throughout the process of sanctification - being made holy - we are being shaped into the image of Jesus Christ. We are saved so that we can reflect God's glory even as the Son reflects his glory. We cannot do that if we are not holy people.

Second, we are chosen for adoption. Adoption brings us into the family of God, making us his children. God has no children outside of those found in Christ. Muslims are not children of God. Atheists are not children of God. We pray that they might someday be, that they would be saved, but outside of Christ they are not his children. **John 1:12** affirms that adoption takes place only through Christ: *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...*

Aha! someone might say. I have you here! All who received him, who believed in his name. Does this not imply humans have the ability to choose? To believe? Is this not the free act of the individual responding to God's offer of salvation? Do not miss the very next verse, **John 1:13**: *...who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.* Those who receive him, who believe in his name, do not do so because of their own will but

because of the will of God. John affirms that those adopted by God, those made his children, are made children because of God's will, not their will.

Third, we are saved to bring glory to God. Everything God does for us is out of his love for us. We should never try to diminish the depths of his love for us. But we should not ignore the other side of God's motivation. His love for you is real but it is not the only - or the greatest - reason why he has saved you. Everything God does is to bring glory to himself. We are good at talking about God acting on our behalf out of love for us but we too often forget to include the fact of his glory.

Many times and ways the Bible reveals that God acts for his own glory. **Isaiah 48:11** reads: *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.* **Psalm 25:11** says, *For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.* There are many other similar examples in the Bible.

But doesn't this make God selfish, someone might ask? No! The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are commanded to make God the center of our existence, the focus of our being. And we are to glorify him. God would be guilty of violating his own law if he violated his own commandment. He would be an idolater if man was higher than himself in his sight. Humans are to be humble before the Lord and one another precisely because there is someone greater than them. There is no one greater than God. He is not being arrogant or boastful when he exalts himself. He is being God.

Some try to use Calvinist theology as an excuse to turn away from God. "If I am chosen, he will save me when he wants. Until then I will live the way I want." But throughout the Bible we see that men remain responsible for how they respond to God's offer of salvation. You must turn to Christ. You must cling to him. Yes, you must choose him. In the greater picture we see that it is he who first chose us but from our perspective your response to his gift is still essential. Hell is the place for those who die in the sins they committed freely while freely rejecting the grace offered in Jesus Christ. To know salvation you must receive Christ. You must be in him, crucified with him. Do not neglect the gift of the gospel, do not let it pass you by. Cling to Christ for holiness, for adoption into the family of God, for the chance to fulfill life's ultimate purpose: proclaiming the glory of God.