

The Ephesians Series
SOVEREIGN SELECTION (Part Two)
Ephesians 1:1-14
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We come again to Ephesians chapter 1 and the great topic of sovereign election. This week an Interstate 35 bridge in downtown Minneapolis, loaded with rush-hour traffic, dropped more than 60 feet into the Mississippi River, sending at least 50 cars and passengers into the water. The search continues to this day. Perhaps you saw, as I did, a nearby security camera captured those 4 seconds that must have seemed like an eternity to those that were caught on the bridge. All of us watched in horror as frame by frame, the bridge collapsed into the mighty Mississippi. Perhaps you had a chance to see the interviews, as I did, of several of the survivors; and it's really quite a moving thing to contemplate. I was struck though with several of them who, assuming that the bridge could continue its plunge into the Mississippi at any point--that the other sections might fall, that cars might come catapulting down upon them from the sections that were still standing--moved immediately to try to rescue those that could be rescued. And they found themselves, these survivors did, faced with a terrifying, split-second decision. Who do I save? Who do I rescue? They were, in effect, in that moment--as I thought about those interviews, they were at that moment-- electing certain people to life.

You see the issue of election is really a part of life. James Montgomery Boice, in his book on the topic before his death, was right when he said, "Election is an inescapable fact of finite human life and history." Choices are made every day. Choices for one that exclude the other. And if election is part of life here on this planet, election is also an inescapable fact of Biblical history. God makes choices. And, for the most part, we can tolerate those choices--God's sovereign choice--even when it comes to individuals, on certain issues. For example, most of us have never given a second thought to God's choice of the twelve apostles. But we could ask several questions. Why those twelve people? And why only twelve? Many people could have benefited from spending those three years in intimate contact with Jesus Christ.

Or think about this. When the disciples spread to tell the message of the gospel throughout the land there, they could only go in one direction. Philip went to Samaria. Barnabas to Antioch. That means the areas they didn't go to were not, at least at that point, evangelized. Each time a choice had to be made, and if God was directing them at all, and most Christians would say that He was, then God was choosing that some hear the gospel rather than others. We make the same sort of choices. If you and I share the gospel with someone, we usually have to make a choice as to which person will hear and that others, in fact, won't. For example, if you're sitting on an airplane--and that's a great place to witness by the way because, you know, they're not going anywhere for several hours--you strike up a conversation with the person sitting next to you. But by striking up a conversation with one person, you are choosing to talk to that person and not to

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the others who surround you. That is a form of election.

So we understand that that's part of life. It's part of God's history in the scriptures. It's part of reality, but when it comes to election unto salvation, that's when many Christians want to get off the bus. Everyone agrees that it was God's decision to provide salvation. Man didn't decide that God would provide salvation; God decided that. And when God decided that, there were only a limited number of ways that God could have chosen to distribute salvation. In fact, God had three options. God could save no one, and that, by the way was a valid option. God was not compelled to save anybody. That was an option God had. He could have chosen to save none. A second option God had was to save all. God could have chosen that option as well. And a third option, then, the third option that was available to Him, was to save some. All Christians reject the first option. Of course, we believe we're saved. That means God chose to save some. It couldn't be none. Most Christians reject the second option, because the second option is really a form of universalism. We're all going to get to heaven. There's nobody going to be excluded, it's going to be universal salvation. Almost all Christians reject that option. So the vast majority of Christians believe the third option, that is, God chose to save some. The doctrine of election discusses God's choice to save those.

We're sitting at the feet of the apostle Paul as he reminds his friends in Ephesus and the surrounding churches of this amazing reality of election. In verse 3--after a very brief greeting in his introductory comments to the church in Ephesus and the surrounding churches--in verse 3 Paul begins by praising God because God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. And beginning in verse 4 and running all the way down through verse 14, Paul lists those blessings. These are the blessings that God has blessed us with. And he begins with election, or we could paraphrase it as sovereign selection. Let me read you again this first section of this lengthy Greek sentence that begins in verse 3. The first section, you remember, is about God the Father's role in the eternal plan of redemption. Let me remind you of what His role was. Beginning in verse 3.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved.

Paul's point in this first section is that if you are a Christian, your spiritual biography began in eternity with a divine choice, with sovereign election. As I mentioned to you last week, here in this section that I've just read for you, Paul outlines several features of divine election. Last week, we just examined the first feature, and it was this. Election is sovereign. The first two words of the clause in verse 4 shout out this feature. "He chose." God the Father chose us. You see you and I are not Christians because we chose God, but ultimately because He first chose us. Just as we love God because He first loved us. In the same way, we chose God because He had first chosen us. The Greek word translated "chose" here literally means to pick, to single out from a group, to select, to choose. It's describing the doctrine, the Biblical teaching of election. Louis Berkhof defines election like this. "It is that eternal act of God, whereby He, in His

sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be recipients of special grace, and of eternal salvation." That's election. So election, as we discovered last week is, first and foremost, a sovereign choice of God. He chose.

Today, I want us to examine several other features of election that Paul identifies here in this verse. The second feature that Paul points out. Not only is election sovereign, but secondly election is individual. It's individual. Notice verse 4 again. "Just as He chose us." He chose us. Now, if this were the first time you had heard that, it would come as a real shock to you. If you were a student of scripture, you would be familiar with the fact that God has chosen in the past. You turn to the pages of the Old Testament, the very first mention we have of this is in Genesis 18:19 where God says about Abraham, I have chosen him. Spin a few pages further into the Old Testament, and in Deuteronomy you learn from the mouth of Moses that God chose Israel to be His people and His witness nation. But here in Ephesians 1 God says, through Paul, that God chose us. By us, Paul obviously meant himself--he was including himself in that--and the Ephesian Christians to whom he wrote. Notice how they are described in verse 1. The saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus. All those who were saints, and all those who were faithful in Christ Jesus were chosen by God. Or, all those who will become believers in Jesus Christ and saints are chosen. William Hendrickson, the great commentator on this book, puts it like this, "This 'us' cannot suddenly have reference to all men whatever, but must necessarily refer to all those who are, or who at one time or another in the history of the world are destined to become, saints and believers." He chose us. Now, with the word "us," you kind of get a corporate dimension, and there is a corporate dimension to God's choice. He has chosen a people for Himself, to be conformed to the image of His Son. But don't misunderstand. God doesn't just choose the group. His choice is individual and personal. This has always been the understanding of God's people. In fact, if you go back to the controversy in the seventeenth century between the followers of Jacob Arminius and the church, the outcome of that discussion and debate was the writings of the Synod of Dort in the seventeenth century. They responded to the teachings of Jacob Arminius, and they put it like this. "Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to free good pleasure, He chose in Christ, to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race." You see that here in Ephesians 1. If we were to take the time--and I'm not going to do it--but if you start at verse 3, go down through verse 14, you find over and over again reference to "we" and "us." It's we and us. Ten times Paul uses that expression in this one sentence.

Now some say, when they look at that word, well that must mean that God chose the church, but not the individuals that make it up. Now think about that with me for a moment. Look at this list of gifts, these blessings, again in this passage. Look, for example at verse 7. One of the gifts we enjoy, one of the blessings we enjoy, is forgiveness. Is forgiveness a group blessing? Does God give forgiveness to the group or does God give forgiveness to individuals? No one would argue that forgiveness is something God distributes to a group, but rather to individuals. The same thing is true if you look down at verse 13, for example. You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise. No one would say that we were sealed as a group, but rather, we were individually sealed. The same thing is true with election. Forgiveness, sealing, aren't corporate gifts. Neither is election. And as we'll see in a few minutes, Romans 9 nails the lid on this coffin. Because in Romans 9, we're told that God chose Isaac and not Ishmael, God chose Jacob and not Esau. It was personal and individual. You see, God didn't just decide generically to

choose to save some people and you just kind of accidentally snuck in without His notice. In eternity past--think about this for a moment--in eternity past, God knew you by name. And God decided to set his love upon you personally, and God decided to choose you, and in time to draw you to Himself, and to impute the death of His Son to your account. He chose you for salvation. It was individual. It was personal.

There are a couple of classic passages that stress the individual and personal nature of God's choice. I want us to turn there together. Turn back to John 10. This is a magnificent passage, and one at some point I hope to preach through because there's so much here. But John 10, and notice verse 14. Jesus says,

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and my own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Now verse 16 is very interesting. Jesus says in this context, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold." Stop there for a moment. Who's He talking about? "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold." Almost universally commentators agree that this is a reference to those Gentiles who will come to faith. Now, there is something very interesting there, because Jesus is calling those who are not yet converted, but who will be converted, His sheep. That doesn't mean they already are His sheep. It means He has--and knows who they are. They are going to be His sheep and that is settled. That is certain. Then He goes on, verse 16, "I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." So Jesus was saying there are individual sheep that I know will come to Me, and I know their name. Look down in verse 26. The opposite is true as well. Verse 26. Jesus says to those antagonistic Jews that He was talking to, "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep." Now that's a very interesting expression. Most of us would expect Jesus to say exactly the opposite. Here's what we expect Jesus to say. "You are not My sheep because you do not believe." That isn't what Jesus says. He says, "you do not believe--why?--because you are not my sheep." You're not those who have been chosen. Verse 27,

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them and they will never perish.

Jesus was making it very clear that He had specific people in mind. In fact, in this passage, He speaks of calling them by name.

Turn over to John 15. You'll see perhaps the most direct comment about this. John 15:16. The context here is the upper room. It's the night before the crucifixion. Judas has already left. It's just the eleven gathered with Jesus in the upper room, and Jesus says this in verse 16, "You did not choose Me but I chose you." Now, many people take that to mean Jesus referring to His choosing them to be apostles. I chose you to be apostles. You didn't choose to be apostles. But that, in the context, is not what Jesus is referring to. He's referring to His choice of salvation--of election. How do I know that? Well, Jesus, remember now, in this passage, is talking only to the eleven. Judas has already left. Turn back to chapter 13, before Judas leaves. Chapter 13:18. Here, Jesus says, speaking to the twelve, "I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel

against Me." In other words, Jesus said to the eleven, I have chosen all of you, but when Judas is present, He says I have not chosen all of you. So Jesus, here, is not talking about choosing to apostleship--obviously Judas was chosen to apostleship. He's talking about something much greater than that. He's talking about sovereign election. I have chosen you, He says to the apostles, to the eleven. What an overwhelming thought. God knew you by name, and He individually chose to love you and to save you and to make you His own. You have not chosen Me, Jesus would say to you, if He was here today, but I have chosen you. Election is individual.

So election is sovereign, election is individual, and thirdly, election, back to Ephesians 1, election is in Christ. He chose us in Him. Now, several weeks ago we looked at what it means to be in Christ. If you weren't here, I urge you to go online and listen because it's a rich and full concept, and one that I don't think we appreciate. Let me give you just a brief summary of what it means here. When the Bible refers to us as being in Christ, it is primarily describing one of two spiritual realities. And depending on the context, as to which is implied. Sometimes both are implied. Sometimes just one of them is implied. One of the two. First of all, to be in Christ means that we are connected to Christ in the sense that God sees Him as our representative. When God looks at us, He never sees us apart from Christ, our representative. So, whatever Jesus does, and did, we get the credit for. We are in Christ, just in the same way--Romans 5--we were in Adam. Adam was our representative in the Garden, and he blew it. In the same way, Jesus is our representative, and everything He does we get credit for.

But there's a second sense in which we are in Christ. We are connected to Christ not only as our representative, but we're also connected to Him in the sense that we are truly spiritually connected. The best illustration that I've found of this is an umbilical cord. As one writer said, it's as if there was a very real umbilical cord flowing from Christ to every Christian, and through that umbilical cord--just as the baby in the mother's womb--flows our life. Our spiritual life and strength flow to us through Christ. That's why Christ uses the image of the branches and the vine. It's the same sort of thing. The life of Christ spiritually flows to us because of our very real spiritual connection to Him. Now which of these two senses does Paul mean here? Christ our representative, or that spiritual connection we enjoy. Paul has to mean Christ as our representative, because we only become spiritually united to Christ at the moment of conversion. And He's talking about election, which happened in eternity past. So He has to be talking here about Christ as our representative. This is what Paul means then. When God chose us, He did so because He saw Christ as our representative. Now, that may seem unimportant to you, but it's absolutely crucial. This is the only reason you are a Christian today. Listen carefully. In eternity past, God chose you only because He saw you as connected to Christ as your representative. Why is that important? It's because God couldn't even set His electing love upon you without that. You see, God is holy, and just, and righteous, and he cannot even in election abrogate those attributes. He cannot be anything less than just, anything less than righteous, anything less than holy. Sin has to be punished, and the demands of His law have to be satisfied. So how could God ever give sinners and rebels the infinite gift of election? He could only do it because of Christ our representative, who lived the life we should have lived, and who died the death for sin we should have died. The only way God could choose you is because He saw you in Christ.

And by the way, there's an interesting ramification of this for Old Testament saints. Because here, Paul seems to say that God only elects or chooses people in Christ. The Old Testament believers were chosen, so that must mean that God saw Christ as the representative of those Old Testament believers. So, in this sense, Old Testament believers were in Christ. He chose us in Christ. The great commentator, F.F. Bruce, says, "Christ is the foundation, the origin, and the executor, all that is involved in election and its fruits depend on Him." He chose us in Christ.

There's a fourth feature of election that Paul identifies in Ephesians 1, and it's that election is unconditional. Election is unconditional. Look at that little phrase in verse 4. He chose us before the foundation of the world. A very interesting expression. The word foundation comes from two Greek words that literally mean, "to throw down." It refers to the act of throwing down a stone foundation for a building. We were chosen by God before He threw down the earth's foundation. When did He do that? Well, according to Genesis 1, on the very first day of creation, God laid the foundation for the world. In other words, Paul is saying this: God chose us in Christ before He created anything, or we could say in eternity, as other passages do. So what does this phrase add to our understanding of election? What does it mean--before the foundation of the world? Well, understand that most Christians agree that God has chosen certain individuals for salvation, but the key sticking point, the key argument is, on what basis did God choose? Why did God choose these people and not those people? Is God's choice conditioned on something in the person He chooses, or is it unconditional--not based on anything in the person He chooses? Arminians argue that election is conditional. It's conditioned on something in me. Henry Thiessen, one of their own who wrote a systematic theology I do not recommend to you, defines election in this way. "It is a sovereign act of God in grace, whereby He chose in Christ Jesus for salvation [listen carefully, He chose] all those whom He foreknew would accept Him." Perhaps you've heard this teaching. That God chose certain people because in eternity past, He sort of looked down the corridors of time with His foreknowledge (and it's defined a different way than the Bible defines it); but with His ability to look down into the future and see who would believe in Him given the opportunity, and once He saw that--oh that person will believe--okay I elect them. And I see that person is going to believe as well, I elect her. That's conditioned on our response. In other words, God chooses us based on His knowledge of our choice, is what they would say. Is that what the Bible teaches? Conditional election? Absolutely not. The Bible teaches that God's choice was unconditioned. It was unconditional. God didn't choose you because of anything in you. God's choice of certain people to be saved is based solely on His own sovereign pleasure and on no condition in the person He chooses. That is why Paul throws in this little phrase "before the foundation of the world." Because it's used in several other contexts in the New Testament to make this very point. We'll look at one of them in just a moment.

Commenting on "before the foundation of the world" one commentator, Peter O'Brien, says this: election took place before creation--or "the fact that election took place before creation--indicates that God's choice was due to His own free decision and love, which are not dependent on temporal circumstances or on human merit. The reasons for His election were rooted in the depths of His gracious sovereign nature." Now this shouldn't surprise us that God chose because of nothing in us. It's how He chose Israel, isn't it? You remember Deuteronomy 7:7? Moses, speaking to Israel about God's eternal love for them says this, "The Lord did not set His love on you or choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the

fewest of all peoples." So why did God choose Israel. Moses says, "because the LORD loved you." There's no other explanation. It's not anything in you. It's because He loved you. It's because He set His love upon you. It's because of who He is. You come to the New Testament, you see this same idea expressed in 2 Timothy 1:9. Paul says God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, [not anything in us] but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." But, by far, when you talk about God's electing love being unconditional--not being conditioned on anything in us--the one passage of scripture that most drives home this concept is Romans 9 where I'd like for us to turn for the rest of our time together this morning. Romans 9. Ephesians 1 is the second greatest passage on election in all the scripture. The greatest is Romans 9.

Now, let me give you a little context of this passage just so we can get into the flow of it. Paul begins, in Romans 9:1-5, with his concern for his Jewish brethren who have heard the gospel but not responded to it. Notice verse 2.

I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

He's concerned that there are Jewish people who haven't believed in Jesus. Now immediately then, that raises a bothersome question. Why? Why haven't they responded? Is there some inherent weakness in the message itself? Look at verse 6. "It is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." You see Paul's answer is that it was never God's intention that all the physical descendants of Abraham belong to him. It was never God's intention. God chose specific descendants of Abraham, and that's why they responded. And that's why others have not. Paul here cites three generations. He begins with Abraham in verse 6. He uses the other name for Abraham--Israel. So God chose Abraham. He came to Abraham--or Abram at the time--while he was still worshipping idols, and He made a covenant with him, or according to Genesis 18:19 He chose him. God chose Abraham. Then, in verses 7 through 9 you have the second generation--it's Isaac. Look at verse 7. "Nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but through Isaac your descendants will be named." That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son." Now, what's going on here? The writer, Paul, is reminding the Romans of what the Old Testament teaches, and that is that God purposefully passed over Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn, the older and other son of Abraham, and chose to have the line of Christ go through Isaac.

Now, some might respond to Paul and say, well yeah, of course, I mean God chose Isaac because the other boy wasn't from Sarah, but from her servant Hagar. In other words, God chose Isaac because of some inherent quality within him. That's why Paul gives us the third example. He builds to this third example to drive home that election is not conditioned on anything in us. It's Jacob. Jacob, whose name means "heel-grabber," supplanter, and who lived up to that name throughout his life. Notice how he is God's perfect example of unconditional election. Verse 10. "And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac." Now here we learn in verse 10 that God's choice of Jacob and not Esau had

nothing to do with their heredity. They were both from the same father and the same mother. So it's not like with Ishmael. You can't argue, well yeah, it's because one had, you know, Hagar-- was had by Hagar and the other by Sarah. No in this case they both had the same mother and the same father. Verse 11. It wasn't on the basis of personal merit either. "For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad." So there was no activity on which God based His decision, "so that God's purpose according to His choice [or His election] would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'" So it wasn't based on heredity. They had the same father and mother. God's choice of Jacob was not based on personal merit because neither had done anything good or bad, and His choice was not based on cultural custom, the law of primogeniture. The first to come out of the womb was Esau, but God said no in verse 12, I want the younger to be the one I choose. So what's the conclusion? Look at verse 13. "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" Election is unconditioned on anything in these boys. God did not choose Jacob because of anything in him, and He did not refuse to choose Esau because of anything in Esau.

Now, as all good debaters do Paul, here in Romans 9, anticipates the chief objections to his doctrine of election. The first objection that he anticipates comes to us in verse 14, and it is the issue of fairness. Immediately when you hear what he's just taught, that's your response. Verse 14. "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" Now you tell me, how was it that you responded the first time you heard about unconditional election--that God chooses based on nothing in us? How did you respond? Wait a minute--that is just not fair. And that's exactly what Paul anticipates. That's why he responds this way. This is not fair! By the way that, in itself, that this would be the first objection, in itself is an argument for unconditional election. Because whatever Paul is teaching in Romans 9 about election, the very first response he expects is what? It's unfair! That means he cannot be teaching the Arminian view, that God looks down the corridors of time and sees who's going to believe. What could be fairer than that? No Arminian has ever taught what he believes and then been charged with being unfair. It's only unconditional election.

Now notice Paul's answer to this objection of fairness. Wait a minute--it's just not fair for God to make a choice like that. Verse 15 is his response. "For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." You know what Paul is saying to the issue of fairness? It is God's sovereign right because He's God, to make this choice. He uses two men. Moses, representing an elect man, and Pharaoh representing a non-elect man. And look at the conclusion he draws in verse 16.

So then it does not depend on the man who wills [doesn't depend on human decision] or the man who runs [that is human effort] but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth. So then [verse 18] He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires."

Now think about Paul's response to the issue of fairness. This is God's right, to make this choice, and it's not unfair at all. Think about it for a moment. What is unfair about God unconditionally choosing some for salvation? Who is treated unfairly? Some get mercy, thank God. Others get

justice. But nobody gets less than they deserve. Everyone is treated fairly. It's like sometimes happens in our culture. Occasionally the President of the United States will make a decision to pardon a criminal who is going to be executed for his crimes. Now, when he does that, other death-row inmates can say a lot of things. They can say I wish it were me, but they cannot fairly and legitimately say, wait a minute, that's just not fair. I'm being treated unfairly. And they will eventually get exactly what their crimes deserve. No one is treated unjustly. It's the same way with God's choice.

Now in verses 19 to 23, there's a second objection he anticipates, and it's the objection that election violates human freedom. It violates free will. Verse 19. "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'" No one--we don't resist His will then. The point of the question is this. Election--if that's what you're going to teach, Paul, that it's not conditioned on anything in us, but God chooses, then election like that--undermines human freedom. It undermines free will. And Paul's answer comes in verses 20 to 23. He begins with the metaphor of the potter and the clay. Look at verse 20.

On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

So he gives this metaphor, and he's really making two points with it. He's saying first of all, the potter makes both vessels from the same lump of clay. In other words, there is nothing intrinsic in the clay that makes the potter decide: okay this is going to be a pot for nice purposes that's going to hold water, it's going to hold food, it's going to hold flowers; and this clay over here is of a different kind, and it's going to be for common uses. I'm going to make a privy pot out of it, a chamber pot, or I'm going to make a garbage pail out of it. There's nothing intrinsic in the clay that makes the potter make that decision. And the second point he's making with this metaphor of the pot and the clay is, it is the potter's sovereign right to decide what the finished product will be. He applies it in verse 22. He applies the metaphor of the potter.

What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?
And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy,
which He prepared beforehand for glory.

He's basically saying, listen, God is the potter, and we are the clay. By the way, Arminians say that God doesn't save everyone because He has a higher purpose. What's that higher purpose? Human free will. He doesn't want to violate your will. Paul here says, God doesn't save everyone for a higher purpose, and that higher purpose is His own glory.

Now, there's a dark side to election. It's hinted at in this passage. We'll look at it along with a number of other questions and objections next week, but I want you to think about this with me, Christian. Think about what we've just learned together, that election is unconditioned on anything in you. Think about the electing love of God. Meditate on this: God chose you. Think about His election. It was sovereign. He chose. It was individual and personal. He chose us. It

was in Christ. It was unconditional. That is before the foundation of the world, before any of us had done anything good or bad, it wasn't conditioned on anything we had done, anything we were, it was conditioned on His choice. He loved you like Israel because He loved you.

Why is this important? Why does Paul begin the letter of Ephesians with this issue? What does Paul pray for the Ephesians to understand? He says my prayer for you is that you will come to grasp the breadth and the height and the depth of the love of God. So he begins here in eternity past, with the electing love of God for you. Christian, if you can get your arms around this great truth of election--that God loved you because He loved you, and that He loved you in eternity past, individually, and personally, and really. And that He loves you today and that He'll love you into eternity because He set His love on you. It will absolutely transform your Christian growth and life and experience, if you can get your arms around the love of God. And that's why Paul begins here.

If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ, and you find yourself maybe in despair--well how do I know if I'm elect? How do we know if we're elect? God doesn't write an E on our foreheads or an E on our chests. How do you know? I love the way Charles Spurgeon puts it. Listen carefully. He says, "Many people want to know their election before they look to Christ. But they cannot learn it thus. It is only to be discovered by looking unto Jesus. Look to Jesus, believe on Him, and you shall make proof of your election directly, for as surely as you believe, you are elect. If you will give yourself wholly up to Christ and trust Him, then you are one of God's chosen ones. Go to Jesus just as you are. Go straight to Christ. Hide in His wounds, and you shall know your election. Christ was at the everlasting council. He can tell you whether you were chosen or not, but you cannot find out in any other way. Go and put your trust in Him. There will be no doubt about His having chosen you in eternity past, when you have chosen Him."

Let's pray together. Our Father, we are overwhelmed with your amazing love. We thank you, Father, for the greatness of the love You've shown us in Christ--that in eternity past, because You saw Him as our great representative, that You have chosen us, and that you have made us Your own in time. Father, I pray that You would help us to understand, to grasp the depth and the richness of Your love for us, and that, understanding that love, we would respond to You with spiritual strength and growth and vitality. That it would change our perception of You. That it would change our perception of ourselves. That it would revolutionize us. That we who have come to know and experience Your eternal electing love would, in turn, love You and love others. Father, change us as a result of this amazing truth about Your amazing love. We pray in Jesus name. Amen