

(Suggested Subfolders: 02 Almighty God / 05 Witnessing & Evangelism))

195 Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world

"Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" is the first great cry of praise in the Holy Spirit's letter, through His servant Paul, to the Ephesians and to the rest of us. For Almighty God has already blessed His people with every spiritual blessing "in the heavenlies with Christ" (1.3).

We are then told further amazing things: that God the Father chose us - that is, those who by a response of simple faith are now "in Christ" - before the very foundation of the world, and that that choosing was for the purpose of our being "holy and without blemish before Him in love" (1.4). This choosing, "electing" or "predestinating" (1.5a), involves our being adopted into God's own family, this wonderful blessing being "through the Lord Jesus Christ" and through Him alone (1.5 / John 14.6 / Matthew 11.27 / Acts 4.12 / I Timothy 2.5 / and others).

So two crucial spiritual truths are explained to us here: first, that Almighty God our Creator is sovereign and acts entirely as He so wishes - "according to the good pleasure of His will" as it is described here (1.5b); and second, that God has chosen some, and therefore by implication, not others.

Now this second truth, concerning His sovereign choosing, has always been difficult to understand, for it seems to raise some rather blunt questions! - "Why me? Why not him or her? Why not everyone?". Fair questions, and a short Reflection such as this cannot hope to answer them at any great depth. Even so, we do have pointers across Scripture to help us to accept this reality, while not yet understanding much of the How or Why. (Article XVII of the Thirty Nine Articles in the Book of Common Prayer is also helpful).

For a start, a read-through of the whole first chapter of Ephesians emphasises the abundant mercies and blessings of God, dispelling any notion of His acting arbitrarily or unjustly to anyone: He simply isn't like that.

Then there are the repeated promises in Scripture that the blessings to be found by faith in Christ are indeed freely available for all (see for example Matthew 7.7-14 and 11.28-30 / John 3.16-19, 35-36 / Acts 2.21, 38-39 / Acts 8.35-38 / Romans 3.22 and 10.9-10 / I Timothy 2.1-6 / and others). So whatever may be the various implications of being "chosen", these clearly do not involve the permanent exclusion of anyone else from the prospect of salvation. The fact is that all have opportunity to respond to the Lord's gracious call, "Come, follow Me", and all are accountable for their response to that call.

In practice therefore nobody has the right to excuse themselves from accepting "Jesus Christ as Lord" on the specious grounds of "Well, He obviously hasn't chosen ME!". Whenever someone comes to faith in Christ, it is at that point, for the first time, that their till-then-unknown "election in Christ" is beautifully revealed. Until that point is reached it is the Lord alone who knows who His "elect", His "chosen ones", actually are.

In view of this state of our "not yet knowing", we are to sow freely the seed of the Word of God by our lives. Some of that seed will fall on good soil (and much won't - that is normal), leading to the wonderful response of a sinner coming to faith in Christ, receiving salvation, and having their election at that time made manifest to all. Out there in a rough, tough world the Lord already has His "elect", whose salvation in Christ He will bring to pass, perhaps through people like us, in His own good time and manner.

These twin truths of God's sovereignty on the one hand, and human freedom on the other, have been likened to two parallel lines which one day God will show us have been interwoven all along. Meanwhile as Christ's faithful sheep we marvel at God's mercy in choosing us, through no merit of our own - because He wanted to; and we remain aware that among the many people around us some, like us, have been "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him in love".

But they don't yet realise this

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