

LSB Ephesians 1:3-6

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, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved.

I love this analogy of the grand canyon. Verse 3, which I only scratched the surface of last week, and very poorly at that, is the breathtaking view from the edge. Or in our new world of radio controlled drones with superb digital cameras, it's the fly-over.

It only introduces for us, the possibilities of unfathomable depths and incomprehensibly limitless different possible views of what God has wrought.

The possibilities, from a photographers point of view, are infinite.

That's what we have in verse 3.

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,

This is the overview. Every spiritual blessing, in heaven and on earth, are ours. We can no more get our heads around that than the photographer can take a photo of every view from every angle of the entirety of the grand canyon.

In fact our poor little finite brains can only begin to try to grasp at eternal things. We look down into that canyon and . . . it's big. It's really really big. Where do we start.

Well, if you're Paul, who is about a thousand times smarter than I am, you start at the beginning, which isn't the beginning at all, because, the

beginning of all of our blessing, all of our inherited wealth, goes all the way back to when there was no time. No physical creation.

The time space continuum that is the only thing we can sort of try to understand, hadn't been created yet. Before there was anything, there was God. Eternal God. And we are the product of the mind of God, in eternity past. Although what I just said, is impossible. Eternity, and past, are mutually exclusive. But we use terms like eternity past and eternity future to try to help our finite heads try to understand the incomprehensible and inscrutable.

Before the worlds and time were, God was, **(IS)** and in the mind and purposes of God, outside of time and physical universes, God knew us, thought us, spoke us, to be His own possession.

Simple, right? No, wrong. So impossibly complex that I have to tell my limited mind in advance, you cannot understand this now. This isn't for you to understand; This is for you to marvel at in awe and worship.

The basis for worship is not in what we can pidgeon hole and understand. The basis for worship is in the realization that we have a God, who has revealed Himself in His word, His revelation, and He is a God that is beyond my capabilities to understand. God is inscrutable. That's a good word. Look it up. Past understanding. Beyond comprehension.

So Paul, punching way beyond his weight, jumps right in at the beginning, which isn't the beginning, because it's eternity. In the mind of God, Christ, and IN Christ, the elect. Inscrutable. And yet, this doctrine is the basis of worship.

The very fact that this is impossible, makes me fall on my face in worship of a God, who can think what I can't think, and do what I can't do, and create me to understand just enough that I understand that I can never understand, and God is like that canyon that I peer into. Limitless. And because of His vast incomprehensible inscrutability, I can only stand in

awe and worship.

Are you ready to be dropped into the deep end? Here we go;
4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved.

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world

Welcome to a head on collision with predestinated election. The words could not be any simpler. We'll begin with the pronoun, He. Who. God who is the *God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ*. That's who the He is in this verse. God the Father did this.

What did He do. He chose us. And again, the word is as simple as it can be. Choice. The word means exactly what it sounds like it means. Selection. Choice. I walked out to the apple tree earlier, and I chose a single apple from the multiples on the tree. It means to cull something out of a larger group. To choose.

Back in 1971, Mr. Nixon ended the draft at number 89. Each birth date had a number assigned to it. My birthday of August 22 randomly became number 85. So I was selected. Chosen to give Uncle Sam 6 years of service in the military at the very end of the Viet Nam era. Selected out of a much larger group of 18 year olds.

That poor illustration is only useful to illustrate the word chose. Selection is all it is. I'm not saying God has ping pong balls with numbers that are random to the selector popping around in an air machine like Bingo numbers. Only saying the word chose means selection from a group.

Now our simple statement tells us when He chose us. Before the foundation of the world. Before God spoke anything physical into

existence. Before creation. Before physical matter. Before God designed time and space. Before God spoke evenings and mornings and 24 hr earth revolvings into being, out of nothing, He selected me to be IN Christ.

That oft repeated term, IN Christ to be IN Christ is the key to try to grasp any of this beyond comprehension paragraph. IN Christ we are chosen, holy, blameless, present with Him in love, vs 4, adopted by the Father, in Him, vs 5, and it is IN Christ that we give God pleasure and bring Him glory in vs. 6, and IN Christ we are the recipients of grace.

None of the wealth is possible standing alone. All of it is shed upon Christ, and it is only IN Him that we receive all of the wealth. Adoption is the key. Christ is God's co-equal Son. In Him we receive all of the riches the Son is heir to, because we become His adopted sons, and as sons, *heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ*. Rom. 8:17

I did the easy part first. Pretty simple stuff. God selected us before creation. OK, not so simple, my brain can't really understand that, but He's God. He can do stuff that I can't do. Before anything was, in eternity past, which is impossible, God knew me, intimately, and selected me to be IN Christ.

He knew my name. He wrote it in a book. Before matter or time or space existed, God had a book and He wrote my name in it. A trillion trillion years before I was a fertilized egg inside my mother, God not only knew me, He chose me.

That's the easy part. Easy because He just told me in very simple words, that's what He did. Pretty bad when I can't even begin to understand the easy part. What's the hard part, you say. I know y'all are a lot smarter than I am, and you're waiting for the hard part so you can 'splain it to me. Right?

You're not terribly surprised that I can't figure out the hard part. But you're all sitting out there saying, tell me what it is, and I'll give it a go. I know.

OK, the hard part is why? Why me? And it pleased God to tell me that part that He told me, but He doesn't tell me why?

Why would He choose me, and not the people next door? He doesn't tell me. And that question drives people insane. It makes us crazy. Because, on the surface, it seems unfair.

Now, then, please don't waste my time telling me you've got this all figured out. You see, God selected according to our choice. Our free will. We selected Him and He's sitting in eternity and says, Oh, very well, Jim chose me so I'm going to write his name in my book.

God is governed by . . . *my* choices? Utter nonsense. It not only makes God the slave of my sovereignty over Him, it also makes Him a liar. He just said He chose. Well, if His choice is dependent on my choice, He's playing fast and loose with the truth telling me He chose me. Who chose who?

Paul saw this craziness coming a mile away and he writes the answer that we don't want to hear in Romans 9.

*10 And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; 11 for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that the purpose of God according to **His choice** would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* Romans 9:10 - 13

Not because of works, but because of Him who chooses. He chooses according to His purpose. Those twins were still in the womb when God made His choice. Jacob I loved. Esau I hated. Actually that choice was made in eternity before anything else existed. Before the foundation of the world. God chose Jacob, the younger over Esau, the first born.

But, but, **but**, *but*, but! that's not fair, you gasp! Paul's a smart guy. He knew ahead of time that this would come up. The people down the block are going to hell because God hates them and didn't choose them. How is that fair???!!!

Here's Paul's answer. Shut up. OK, that's the abbreviated transliteration. Here's the longer nicer version;

*14 What shall we say then? Is there any unrighteousness with God? May it never be! 15 For He says to Moses, “**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 So then it does not depend on the one who wills or the one who runs, but on God who has mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very **purpose** I raised you up, in order to demonstrate My power in you, and in order that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” 18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. 19 You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” 20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? Will the thing molded say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this”?*** Romans 9:14 - 20

I've heard the argument; I don't care what you say, that's unfair, and I could never worship a God who is unfair.

Congratulations. You've just elevated yourself to a higher position of moral authority than God. You decide whether or not God Himself is appropriately fair according to your standards?? Let me know how that works out.

I would counter, I could never worship a God who is not sovereign over every created thing and every choice, whether I understand it; or not.

Actually, the better question is why did God choose anyone? We're all sinners. We're all vile, filth to Him. Why didn't God simply sweep Adam's race into hell and start over again. Perhaps the moral question is, how can

you choose any of us rebellious filthy sinners to be IN Christ? That's a better moral question to ask if you want to whine about what is "fair".

I deserve hell. Was it moral for you to choose me, wash me, adopt me, and give me to your son as a bride? No rebellious sinner anywhere deserves grace. I think it's pretty dangerous to begin to ask about what anyone in Adam's race deserves.

"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

This doctrine of God's sovereign choice in election is either loved or hated. There isn't much middle ground. Some people hate it because they think they need to sort of protect God from the bad press He's bringing on Himself by being sovereign over anyone's free will.

It sort of goes like this. I know what it says, but it can't mean what it seems like it says, or else that makes God a monster who decides that people who I love should go to hell just because He didn't choose them. So, I'll admit I don't understand it, but it can't mean that.

And yet, Paul uses the illustration of Pharaoh, who God clearly says, He raised him up in order to harden pharaoh's heart so that God would be glorified by pharaoh's rebellious hardness of heart.

And he uses the illustration of Jacob and Esau. And honestly, from a human perspective, Esau seems like the easier person to like. Jacob is kind of slippery. Kind of a weasel. A mama's boy. And after he wins the family blessing and runs away, many years later when he returns, Esau welcomes him with open arms.

It did not please God to explain to the likes of me, why He chooses who He chooses. Why He has mercy on who He chooses to have mercy and compassion on who He chooses to have compassion.

He's God. He doesn't tell us His reasons. What He does tell us is this if Revelation 19:1,2;

1 After this I heard a sound like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God! 2 For His judgments are true and just. Rev. 19

All through the scripture, God tells us that His judgements are true and right. That's all I need to know. The great roar of the multitude in Rev. 19 is in heaven. Perhaps in heaven we'll get to see more, understand more. No one in that multitude is scratching their head trying to figure out God's choices.

Perhaps the best solution is to say, I take God at His word, and though I now see in a mirror dimly, later on, these things my brain is too small to figure out will cause me to roar with that multitude in a chorus of worship.

Even now, the fact that I can't understand election, causes my heart to worship God who is wholly and totally sovereign over His righteous choices. His sovereignty is so far above my tiny intellect, all I can do is worship.

I'm one of the people who loves this truth. I shout in worship with the Psalmist when he says;

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Psa. 115:3 and again; The LORD does all that pleases Him in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and in all their depths. Psalm 135:6

Listen to what Nebuchadnezzar said, after he ate grass like a beast in the field for 7 years, and then God restored him to his throne;

All the peoples of the earth are counted as nothing, and He does as He pleases with the army of heaven and the peoples of the earth. There is no one who can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?' Dan

One final clue as to the "why" question. Just to mess with you. We have one little foggy window into God's "why's" in what Paul told the Corinthians

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brothers, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may abolish the things that are, 29 so that no flesh may boast before God. 1 Cor. 1:25 - 29

We're mostly pretty common, pretty painfully ordinary, unimpressive folk. We who God has chosen. And yet it has pleased Him to include some brilliant minds in His selection too. God has His brilliant scientists and even some people like Daniel, within wretched governments. His choice is without limits. But thank goodness for the dummies, or I wouldn't be in the mix.

OK, back to Ephesians 1. This is a challenge to try to teach. This is one of the most lofty portions in all of scripture. Verse 3 is the call to worship;

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,

Verses 4 - 6 and beyond are the reason FOR worship; God sovereignly chose to pour out blessings upon us.

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He

graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved.

All of the good things that follow election; holiness, blamelessness, in love, adoption as sons, glories and grace, riches bestowed on us, in the Beloved

Those are just the beginnings of the wealth we'll drown in here, but the reason to love the doctrine of election is because, all of the wealth, all of the good stuff, is given to me, outside of who I am, or even better, who I was, as a son of Adam, it's given to me by God's sovereign choice. I had nothing to do with God's sovereign election, and likewise, (here's the good part, if you're me), I can't mess it up.

Everything of value here, is God caused. It all happens based on His sovereign choice. Nothing here depends on me, or anything I willed, or anything I did, or me messing it up later on, God does it all. I do nothing, but receive these riches, which, oh by the way, if it were up to me in my dead, fallen state, in Adam, I could never have chosen anyways.

We'll see that in chapter 2. Dead people don't choose God. They're dead. God chooses them, and graciously breathes life into them, and pours out His blessings on them. It's all Him. None me.

And that becomes the basis for joy. I can't mess this up. Election means, all of the blessing is mine, and there's nothing I ever did, or ever can do, to change what God has sovereignly chosen to give to me. He finished it all, in eternity past. Way beyond my feeble brain to figure that out. I just revel in my windfall. God, for reasons He doesn't tell me, chose me, and made me an adopted son. I have incalculable wealth waiting in heaven for me. There's nothing I can do or not do, to mess up what God decided and accomplished.

When you even just begin to grasp and understand this doctrine, it becomes the most comforting doctrine of all. I won the lottery. The riches are mine. I can't mess it up. God holds my wealth in trust. It's waiting for me in the

next world. And He has blessed me with tangible joys, even in this world that hates us.

He doesn't tell us the reason for His choice of us. But Paul begins to just overflow with all of the superfluity of the wealth that God has given to the elect. It just sort of pours out of Paul, and trying to make a sentence out of this is like trying to stop the flow of a dam that has burst. Out it comes!

4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved.

In Christ, I am holy. Blameless. I stand before God, in Christ. And I am loved with a love of Father for a son. You look at me if you know me at all and think. Holy? Blameless? That guy??

These are positional truths. I am those things, In Christ, though I fall far short in the nasty now and now. That position is given to me, held in trust, mine because, positionally I possess a righteousness, not my own. I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

I wonder if it might be a helpful exercise to try to turn this regurgitation inside out and look at the polar opposite of being IN Christ.

Let's try to re-write this for those under the federal headship of Adam. Rebellion. Sin. Perhaps we could be bold and say instead of In Christ, those who are In Satan.

This should be popular for our nation which has abandoned Christ in Easter and Christmas as the most important holidays and now spends trillions of dollars on venerating Satan at Halloween. Here's my attempt at Eph. 1:4-6 inside out and opposite. Without Christ, I am:

Born into Adams sinful race, in Satan, we are vile, sinful, rebellious haters of God, worthy of judgement before Him, in hate. We are not adopted by God but are co-opted with Satan, and we cause God grief and sorrow as we glorify ourselves. Though as Creator, He owns us, we have chosen to rebel against God and declare ourselves as gods. In Adam, we are at war with God.

That was difficult to write, but sometimes polar opposite helps us to grasp the reality we're trying to understand. We are either in Adam. Or we are IN Christ.

All of the wealth and blessing that pours out of Paul is for those who have come out of Adam's federal headship, Adam's sinful race, out of this fallen world, and have fled to Christ for forgiveness of rebellion and sin.

Christ takes our sins upon Himself and receives the due judgement for our rebellion, at the Cross. He bears our sins away. And then He bursts out of the grave, alive, and He gives to us His sinless life, His righteousness, His perfection, accounted to our accounts. We have a righteousness, not our own, the righteousness of Christ.

And because of that, Paul can write; 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him in love, 5 by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved.

IN Christ we are holy, blameless, loved, adopted into God's family as sons, and given to Christ. We bring God and Christ pleasure because in Christ we glorify God's grace to us. In the Beloved.

God is glorified by rescuing something that was vile and hopelessly broken and that not only had no value, we were so filthy as to be removed, held at a distance. We get rotting flesh out of the house as fast as possible. That's what we were to God. Vile, dead, worthless, disgusting, rotting filth.

But He chose us. He made us alive from the dead. He quickened our dead rotting spirits to life. He washed us and removed the dead rotting filth. He restored us and made us clean and pristine and He gave us pristine white garments to wear. We are clothed in Christ's righteousness. Then He adopted us and made us sons, heirs of His wealth. He did it all, for His own glory.

I piddle around in the old car hobby. We have these guys who dig up some rusty hulk abandoned in some wash, worthless rusty hulks and they restore those things to glorious shining bejeweled automobiles that are worthy of showing, to win a prize. A trophy or a ribbon.

God does that with humans. He found me drowning in sewage. He held His nose and snatched me out of vile filth. Then He washed me and took away my filthy garments and clothed me in the perfect white clean garments of His Son's perfect righteous sinless life. Then He declared me to be an adopted son along side of His Son, Christ, and made me an heir of all of His wealth.

What a restoration project. What glory is deserved by Him who would do that for someone who came out of the filth, spitting and biting and fighting against His good purpose. This is the doctrine of election. Embrace it, even though you cannot fully grasp it. We are God's restoration project. He is worthy of all worship and glory for what He has done.

I'll end this morning on the positive side of what we can not fully grasp or understand. A verse that is very familiar. A verse that is loved. Revelation 22:17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come. Let the one who wishes receive the water of life without cost.*

The doctrine of free will, free choice for anyone to come and drink the waters of life, is easily found and taught by scripture alongside of election by predestination. Both doctrines are there. Both are easily supported in

scripture. Both are true.

Don't think that because I've spent the morning talking about election that I don't believe people have free will, free choice to come to God and ask forgiveness. When I get to those passages, I'll teach them just as forcefully as I've taught God's sovereign election this morning.

But here's my wisdom as your elder and pastor. Don't cheapen both doctrines by trying to reconcile them. That's God's business, not yours. You try to reconcile these things and you damage both God's sovereignty and man's free will. Leave these mysteries alone. Seemingly irreconcilable differences, in your mind, but perfectly reconciled in God's mind.

That can be a problem for some of you. Admitting that God's smarter than you are. Trust me, He has this all figured out. It IS beyond you. Accept His sovereignty and wisdom and righteousness by faith, and leave these things to Him.

When I was a boy, just thinking about these things for the first time, a neighbor explained the reconciliation like this. And it's actually helpful. You approach a doorway with a huge banner over it that says, Whosoever will, may come! You go through the door and turn around and there's another banner on the inside facing those who came in. It says, Chosen from before the foundation of the world. Same door. One view outside, one view from inside.

Someone asked D. L. Moody how to reconcile this verse with the doctrine of election that we've looked at this morning, and he wisely said; There are two groups of people. The who-so-ever wills, and the who-so-ever won'ts.

I revel this morning in the truth that for reasons I may never be privy to, I am a who-so-ever will. Chosen before the foundation of the world to be IN Christ.

11 He came to what was His own, and those who were His own did not

receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11 - 13