

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Ephesians 1:3–14

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Above all other things we are grateful to God that He has saved us. Nothing else would matter if that were not true. And we affirm together that our salvation is fully the work of God, that He is worthy of all praise, for He has provided for us salvation. It is a gift. It has been given to us. It is all God's work, and all the glory belongs to Him. What a wonderful realization that is.

One scripture stands out in my mind in thinking about this. It's Ephesians chapter 1, and I invite you to turn there in your Bible, if you will, Ephesians chapter 1. And I want to read in your hearing verses 3 through 14. This great paean of praise from the heart of the Apostle Paul is not a cool documentation of some theological argument; it is the passion and overflow of his own thankful heart. It appears in the original as if there is no break at all. And while some of the translators have chosen to put commas and periods, it doesn't seem in the original that there's any stopping point from verse 3 through 14, he just continues to allow his heart under the inspiration of the Spirit of God to gush out praise for the God who has saved him.

And as I read it in your hearing, would you listen for those things which assign our salvation wholly to God. 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 should 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. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him, with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times. That is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will to the end that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed you were sealed in Him with the Holy

Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory.”

What dominates this wonderful section of Scripture is the idea that God has brought about salvation by His own will, and His own purpose, and His own design, and to the praise of His own glory. In verses 5, 9 and 11, salvation is ascribed to His will. In verses 6 and 7 it is ascribed to His grace. Again in verse 7, to His blood. In verse 4, to His love. In verse 9, to His good intention. In verse 11, to His purpose. And in verses 12 and 14, to the praise of His glory.

Salvation is not a result of the will of man. It is not a result of the merit of man. It is not a result of some religious sacrifice on man's part. It is not a result of the love of man. It is not a result of the good intention of man. It is not a result of the purpose of man. And it is not to the praise and glory of man. Every aspect of salvation is born out of the purpose, and the will, and the plan of God that when it is accomplished it may be solely and only to the praise and the glory of God. God has saved us in order that He might be glorified; therefore, all in our salvation belongs to His credit. Every aspect of salvation is the work of God, but you will notice here that that work is mediated through Christ. In verse 4 it says it is in Him, meaning Christ. In verse 5 it says it is through Jesus Christ. In verse 6 it says it is in the beloved one, meaning Christ. In verse 7, in Him, meaning Christ. In verse 9, purposed in Him, meaning Christ. In verses 10 and 11, in Him, referring to Christ. In verse 12, in Christ. In verse 13, twice, in Him, again referring to Christ.

Our salvation is solely and only and wholly the work of God, but through Christ it is wrought. And also, with the Holy Spirit, verse 13 notes that we have been sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, the guarantee of the full and future redemption of God's own possession. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are given all the credit for salvation. And thus theirs is all the praise.

Let me remind you that every element in salvation is the work of God. And let me remind you by using the words of the Holy Spirit inspired writer Paul. First of all, would you notice 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.” Paul is there saying the one deserving all the credit is God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. This is praise to God, praise ascribed to God the Father for what He has done. And what has He done? Number one, He chose us. Look at verse 4. Just as He chose us in Him, meaning Christ, before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He chose us to be made holy in Christ. He chose us to become blameless in Christ. He chose us before the foundation of the world.

Now, the verb he chose us means to pick for oneself. It's a reflexive verb, and it turns back on the one who chooses. God chose for His own sake. He chose for Himself, very personal. And He chose us, all of us who are saved, He chose, it says very explicitly, note it, before the foundation of the world, before the world ever

began. Before the world was ever created which means before any of us were ever born, He had already chosen us. Scripture repeats this tremendous truth of the choice of God as to who would be redeemed before the world was ever made. It repeats it many places. Matthew 25:34: "Come you who are blessed of My Father, said Jesus, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

The Lord designed His kingdom from before the foundation of the world and He designed who would be in it from before the foundation of the world, and you and I are saved and we know the Lord Jesus Christ because God chose us before the world ever began. What an incredible reality. In Luke 12:32 we find again that the Lord says, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the Kingdom." And again, the choice is always with God. Men don't choose God, God chooses men. His is the choice.

In John, there are several wonderful statements to this effect. One familiar to us, Jesus says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, compels him, pulls him, drags him." And in John 15:16, that wonderful statement of Jesus to the disciples in which He says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit." We didn't choose Him, He chose us. We didn't decide for Christ in the truest sense; He decided for us. In Acts chapter 9, you remember the apostle Paul was confronted by the Lord on the Damascus Road, and the Lord said in verse 15, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine." The conversion of the apostle Paul was abrupt, startling, shocking. The man was on his way to persecute Christians. He was supernaturally, divinely converted on the spot, transformed and called to be an apostle because God had chosen him to that before the world began.

In the thirteenth chapter of Acts, a most fascinating statement is found in verse 48. Paul and Barnabas ready to preach: "And when the Gentiles heard this," that is, regarding the gospel, and the gospel of salvation, "they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord," now note this, "and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." The only people who believe are those who have been appointed to eternal life. God only grants the gift of faith to those who are predestined to salvation. He chose us. And to those He has chosen, He gives the power to believe.

In 2 Thessalonians, a wonderful statement, chapter 2 verse 13: "But we should always give thanks to God for you." Why should we always thank God? "Brethren, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation." That's why we thank Him. We don't thank you for your salvation. We don't thank you for being bright enough, clever enough, spiritual enough, insightful enough. We thank God for you because God has chosen you from the beginning, for salvation, through sanctification by the Spirit coupled with belief in the truth. There has to be faith on your part, but that faith is the result of God's choosing as He prompts it by His Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:9 it says, "Who has saved us," speaking of God, "and called us with a holy calling not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was," follow this, "granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Tremendous statement. He saved us. He called us, not according to our works, but

according to His purpose, His grace, granted us in Christ from all eternity. That's mindboggling to me. I'm a Christian today because before the foundation of the world from all eternity past, God chose to set His love on John MacArthur and to give Him the faith to believe at the moment that God wanted him to believe. He chose us. Our names, it says, in Revelation 17:8, were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world, before the foundation of the world. We are, says Peter, chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.

We are chosen unto salvation. We are chosen to belong to Him. When you look at your salvation then, thank God. Thank God because you're a Christian because He chose you. I don't understand the mystery of that; that's just what the Word of God teaches. That is the most humbling doctrine in all of Scripture. I take no credit, not even credit for my faith. It all came from Him. He chose me. He selected people to be made holy in order to be with Him forever. Why He selected me, I will never know. I'm no better than anyone else, I'm worse than many. But He chose me. Someone wrote, "I sought the Lord and afterwards knew He moved my soul to seek Him seeking me. It was not that I found O Savior true. No, I was found by Thee." He chose us. He gets all the credit.

Secondly, He predestined us, verse 5. It says it. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will. His will, His intention, His purpose determined our destiny. That's what predestined means. It means to previously determine someone's destiny. He did that. He chose us, and the purpose of His choosing was to set out our destiny. And what was our destiny? To be adopted as sons. Incredible. He chose us for the purpose of predetermining our destiny to be children of God. The purpose of His choosing was to make us His children. To as many as receive Him, John 1:12, He gives the power to become, what? The children of God, or the sons of God. And we are His children, Romans 8 says, and we cry, "Abba, Father, Daddy." It says the same thing in Galatians 3:26. We are His own beloved children. We belong to Him. In Galatians 4:6 it says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father. Therefore you're no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

What a tremendous reality. We are His children. We are not just His children, we are His beloved children. We are His adored children. And John says, and it's little wonder that he says it, in 1 John 3:1, how great love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God, but we are. We are. And so, He chose us. And He chose us for the purpose of predetermining our destiny to become His children. And He did it according to the kind intention of His will. He did it, to put it simply, because He wanted to. It gave Him pleasure. And He says in Isaiah 46:10, "I do all My good pleasure. I fulfill all My purposes." It's an incredible thought. God in eternity past chose you for a destiny and that destiny was to become His child.

Now, to make that possible, we come to a third reality here: He graced us. He graced us. The plan, the choice, the predestination, was activated in reality through His grace, verse 6: "To the praise of the glory of

His grace which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved One,” who is Christ. What is grace? Undeserved favor, unearned blessing, unmerited goodness and kindness. Grace is giving us something we do not deserve at all. And that’s the way we’re saved. We’re saved by grace. In Ephesians 2 it says, “For by grace are you saved through faith and that is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should,” what? “Boast.” We would take the credit if we had any credit to take. But it’s all of Him. The grace is of Him, the faith is of Him, not according to our works. In Acts 15:11, do you remember that wonderful and simple straight-forward statement? “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.” What a testimony. We believe we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. And in the eighteenth chapter of Acts, same book, verse 27, it says he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, wrote to the disciples to welcome him, speaking of Paul. When he arrived he helped greatly those who had believed through grace. It’s the only way anybody believes, is God graciously gives you the ability to believe. You don’t deserve it, He gives it anyway. You can’t merit it, He gives it anyway. You can’t earn it, He gives it anyway.

Romans 3:24 says, “We are justified as a gift by His grace.” A gift by His grace. He graced us. In fact, the phrase there in verse 6 literally means: by grace we have been graced. That’s the idea. He graced us in Christ the beloved One. Grace, then, was the means by which He brought to pass His choice and His predetermined destiny and made us His children.

Fourthly, notice what He did. He redeemed us, verse 7. “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” He redeemed us. What does it mean to redeem? To buy back. What did He do to buy us? Well, we were slaves to sin. We were slaves to death, and hell, and Satan, and demons. We were slave to the fallen flesh. We were slave to the world. And there we were in the slave market. And He came to the slave market and He bought us. Worthless, wretched, vile, rotten, darkened, hopeless, with minds that could never know God, and hearts that could never seek righteousness, and all our desire was lust and evil, and we were unworthy, and He came and bought us. Why? Because He chose us. Because He predestined us. Because He was wanting to grace us with grace. You say, “Why did He want to do that?” I don’t know. He just did. That was His will, that was His purpose, that was His good pleasure.

How did He redeem us? Through His blood. He paid the price. “The wages of sin is death.” The price of redemption is death. The price of redemption is shed blood. And He paid that price. It was not easy to pay that price. He had to take on human form, come into the world, die on a cross, pour out His blood as a sacrifice for sin, but He paid the price to buy us back. That’s why the blood of Christ is precious. That’s why Peter says you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. Sure it’s precious; it’s also praiseworthy. That’s why in Revelation 5 it says, “And they sang a new song, Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for Thou wast slain and did purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” No wonder the host of heaven are praising Him, His blood is precious, His blood is praiseworthy, it was the price of our redemption.

It was the shedding of blood in sacrificial death that allowed Christ to buy us out of sin's slave market and bring us into His holy presence and no longer are we the slaves of sin; we are the slaves of God. And that redemptive work made it possible for Him to do something else. Once He had bought us out of the slave market, fifthly, Paul says, He forgave us. O, blessing. Verse 7, "He provided the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us." He forgave us. He bought us out of the slave market, not to say, "Well, I'm going to hold all that against you. I've done you a big favor, but don't think you're going to get away with anything in the future." No, no, no. He bought us out of the slave market and forgave us. Jesus, at the time when He was instituting His table in Matthew 26:28 said, "This is My blood of the New Covenant," when He held up the cup, "which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." He forgave us.

Forgiveness, *aphimi*, to send away never to return. He removed our sins as far as the East is from the West. He buried them in the depths of the sea. He remembers them no more. No wonder Micah says, "Who is a pardoning God like You?" Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ." Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 2:13 says, "We are forgiven." First John 2:12, "My little children, He has forgiven all your sins for His namesake." How could He do that? Through His grace, through the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us. It took a lot of grace, a lot of grace because we had a lot of sin. In fact, according to the parable of Matthew 18, we have an unpayable debt, almost an uncountable debt, an indescribable debt. To whom do you owe your salvation? You owe it to the God who chose you. You owe it to the God who predestined you. You owe it to the God who redeemed you, the God who forgave you, the God who wanted you to be His own. Because He wanted you to be His own; it doesn't give any other reason, even though we're so unworthy. So unworthy.

And now He has even gone beyond that. Now that we are His children, He enlightened us. He enlightened us. Look at verse 8 and following. In the middle of the verse it says, "In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him." He even gave us a view of an administration suitable to the fullness of times; that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. Can you imagine that? He told us all about His will clear on out to eternity. We know all about the administration of the fullness of times, the summing up of all things in Christ, the glory to come, the millennium, the eternal state, how everything in heaven and everything in earth will be brought together in Christ to His praise.

He enlightened us. He gave us wisdom in eternal things. He gave us prudence in earthly things. And He showed us His plan all the way to the end, here in the Word. He let us in on the whole thing. He gave us not only the Word, but He gave us a resident truth teacher. He gave us His Holy Spirit so that we don't need men to teach us, because we have a teacher from God. He gave us His Spirit so that we know the mind of Christ, so that we know the plan of God. How blessed we are. How absolutely blessed we are of the things that the world doesn't see, we see; the things that the world doesn't understand, we understand; the things that the world can't know, we know.

For we have received not the spirit of the world, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:12, but the Spirit who is from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God. Isn't it wonderful? He enlightened us. We were blinded by the god of this world. We were in darkness, and sin, and death, and could not know God or anything about Him, could not understand Him, and He enlightened us. He enlightened us. Why did He do that? He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him. Because He wanted to. It was His plan, His pleasure, His joy that we would know Him and all about His plan.

Seventhly, He promised us an inheritance. Verse 11, "In Him," the end of verse 10, "also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory." And he repeats, that it all belongs to God. The will was God's, the purpose was God's, the good intention was God's and the glory is God's. And He gave us an inheritance, because He predestined us to be His children, and His children were to receive His inheritance. He promised us an inheritance. Romans 8 says that the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be ours. And 1 John it says, in chapter 3 verse 2, "It doesn't yet appear what we shall be but we know we shall be like Him, when we see Him as He is." And then Peter says: "We have an inheritance undefiled, incorruptible that fades not away reserved in heaven for us."

Every promise in Christ, Paul said, 2 Corinthians 1:20, is yes. What did he mean by that? That everything Jesus promised to us is yes. Do we get that? Yes. Do we get that? Yes. Do we get that? Yes. Peace? Yes. Love? Yes. Wisdom? Yes. Eternal life? Yes. Joy? Yes. Victory? Yes. Strength? Yes. Power? Yes. Knowledge? Yes. Righteousness? Yes. Eternal life? Yes. Truth? Yes. Heaven? Yes. Riches? Yes. Reigning? Yes. Ruling? Yes. It's all yes. Why? Because He wanted to. His purpose, His will, His grace did it all. So He gets all the glory. And how secure is your inheritance?

Eighth, notice, He sealed us. Verse 13, "In Him you also after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge or a guarantee of our inheritance, with a view looking forward to the redemption of God's own possession," that's us, "to the praise of His glory." He sealed us. Sealing something in ancient times was a sign of ownership, a sign of security, a sign of authenticity and a sign of a completed transaction. When we were saved, He sealed us. How? Gave us His Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwelling in a believer is a sign that God owns that believer, a sign that that believer is secure, a sign that that believer is authentic, a sign that that believer has received the completed transaction. He secures us, authenticates us, completes us, and owns us, we are His own possession. Verse 14 says: and the indwelling Spirit is the guarantee that someday we'll experience the fullness of what that means. Marvelous. We wait for the full redemption, Romans 8 says, but we're sealed until that day.

Now, listen carefully. Let me draw this together for you. When you think about your salvation, beloved, there's only one direction you can go with your thanksgiving, and that's toward God. He chose us in Christ before the world was made. So, it's all of His will, it's all of His purpose. It has nothing to do with us, and it's all for His glory. He, then, predestined us through Christ purely on the basis of His love for His own good pleasure, based solely on His will to make us His children for His glory. And then, He graced us, which means there was no merit on our part. It wasn't 99 percent God and 1 percent us. It wasn't 99.9 percent God and 0.1 percent us. It was all God and none of us. It was freely given, He says. Freely given. And that brings all the praise and all the glory to Him. He redeemed us; that is, He provided for and paid the price for our sins, and granted to us freedom from bondage, and sin, and death according to the riches of His unmerited grace, which gives Him all the glory. And then He forgave us. Having paid the price He then freely forgave us all our sins based on nothing which we had done. Again giving Himself all the glory, all the praise.

Then He enlightened us. He revealed His will to us, which we would otherwise never have known, nor ever been able to discover. All the glory for His self-disclosure then belongs to Him. And then He gave us an inheritance: an inheritance which we could not earn, so that all the praise is His. He gave it because He predestined us for it, because He purposed us for it, because He willed it for us, and then He sealed us. He provided security. If it weren't for that, we'd default. We'd fail. But He secures us, and so all the praise is His.

So, "What about us? Do we do anything? We just stand around until He does it?" Notice please, verses 12 and 13, two things are mentioned, and only two, and almost offhandedly. It says in verse 12 that we were the first to hope in Christ. And in verse 13 it says after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed. Hope in Christ, believing the gospel, that's our part. Well, you say, "Wait a minute; you just said that it was all God." Well, that's our response to the work of God, but listen carefully. Even that is generated by God. Even that is generated by God, for by grace are you saved through faith. Even that is not of yourselves but it is the, what? Gift of God. It is God who gives you the power to hope in Christ. It is God who opens your ears to hear the message of the truth, to hear the gospel of salvation and believe. That, too, is a gift.

It's all of Him. It's all energized by the Holy Spirit. You can't hope in Christ without the Holy Spirit generating that hope. You can't believe in Christ without the Holy Spirit generating that faith. So, for what part of our salvation do we deserve praise? None, absolutely none. Absolutely none. The whole human race on its way to hell, and they will be damned to hell because of unbelief. They are condemned, Jesus said in John 3, because they believe not. But God, in sovereign grace, has chosen to save those He has set His love upon. And He picks them up out of the stream of men cascading into hell. What a blessed truth. What a humbling truth. What a pride-smashing truth. We are all saved by His grace. Can we thank Him enough? Why us? Why us? No wonder verse 3 says what it says: "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." The blessing belongs to Him, the glory belongs to Him, the praise belongs to Him.

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