

# God chose us in Christ Jesus

Ephesians 1:3-12

Sermon for July 3 2022

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We are studying the New City Catechism this year, because it is a great summary of what we believe as Christians. I'm going to read Question 27 now, and then let's read the answer together.

## **Question 27: Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Jesus?**

No, only those who are elected by God and united to Christ by faith.

Nevertheless God in his mercy demonstrates common grace even to those who are not elect, by restraining the effects of sin and enabling works of culture for human well-being.

### **Introduction**

Question 27 speaks about a truth that makes us uncomfortable. Not everyone is saved. Not everyone will go to heaven. Hell is real, and our sin means that we are separated from God forever unless we are saved by Jesus. If you are a Christian, it is because God chose you in love. That is the main point of today's teaching and the passage we will read now.

## **Ephesians 1:3-12**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,  
4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.  
5 In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,  
6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.  
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,  
8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight  
9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ  
10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.  
11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,  
12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."*

Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we come to you because you are the source of life and truth. Jesus, we worship because you are full of mercy and love. Holy Spirit, please open our hearts and minds to be transformed by the word of God. Amen.

Our Catechism question for today asks if everyone is saved through Jesus. I think common sense answers the question for us.

We look around and we see that many people are not followers of Jesus. Why? John 3:16 says:

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus paid a debt he did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay. Eternal life is available to anyone who believes that Jesus did that for you. But why are billions of people in the world outside of God's family? Maybe we are smarter than them? No. Maybe we are better people than them. No, that's definitely not true. Why are some people in an eternal relationship with God through faith in Jesus, and some people are not? The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that God chose us in love.

## **Point 1. God chose His children in love.**

Why did God choose some people and not others? We do not know. We cannot know. But God's word teaches clearly that he does, in this passage and others.

Listen to what Jesus said in John 6:63–65.

63 "The Spirit alone gives eternal life.

Human effort accomplishes nothing.

And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

64 But some of you do not believe me."

(For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.)

65 Then he said, "That is why I said that people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me.""

Do you see the word "can't" in verse 65? In the original text, this Greek word here means "is unable to." It is a verb about the ability or power to do something. No one, man or woman or child, has the ability to come to Jesus unless God the Father does something.

That's necessary to understand or nothing else I say will make sense. I know that when you became a Christian you decided to follow Jesus. Many of us remember when we trusted in Jesus. I was 28 years old. I remember the hour, place, and circumstances very well. I remember getting on my knees and saying, "Jesus, please take over my life and be my Lord."

Why did I decide to follow Jesus? You might say, "Well, Chris, you saw that you were a sinner and needed a savior." OK, but I was an atheist before. What changed, so I could understand that Jesus was the only one who could save me? God changed my heart. God gave me eyes to see the depth and nature of my sin. He also showed me through the words of friends and the bible that Jesus is the only hope of sinners. This is the point, God acted first. God moved in my heart and mind to show me the truth. And then I responded with faith and made a decision.

We used Psalm 80 earlier in our worship service. Listen and hear what God's word says about how people are saved. Psalm 80:17-19.

17 "Strengthen the man you love, the son of your choice.

18 Then we will never abandon you again.

Revive us so we can call on your name once more.

19 Turn us again to yourself, O Lord God of Heaven's Armies.

Make your face shine down upon us.

Only then will we be saved."

My friends, before we can be saved, God turns our hearts to himself. That's what we heard from Jesus in John 6:65. Jesus said  
65 "people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me."

The word "unless" means that one thing must happen before the second thing can happen. Unless you turn the oven on, the bread will not bake. Unless you put gas in the car, the car cannot go. Jesus also used the word "unless" in John 3:3. Jesus told Nicodemus 3 "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

To be born again, the Father sent the Holy Spirit, and gave us spiritual eyes to see. Unless the Holy Spirit puts the gift of faith in our hearts, we cannot come to Jesus and see the Kingdom of God.

If you understand and accept what I've said so far, then the doctrine of predestination is not a large step further. A destination is a place you are going. If you want to drive to New York City you put that destination into the map application on your phone. You plan your trip to arrive at the correct destination. The word predestination means that God planned the destination of your soul before your trip on earth began.

God decided to act in my life and yours a long time ago. Verse 4 says "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world." Before Adam and Eve were made, God chose us to be in his family. I can't tell you what the date was. I can't explain everything about it. But it's clearly taught in God's Word. And it affects how we will live together in this church. That's why I think it's good for us to study it.

You don't have to understand predestination to be a Christian or to be a member of this church. It is something that can be confusing, and something that we struggle to believe. We saw in Ephesians 1:9-10 that these things are a mystery.

9 "making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ  
10 as a plan for the fullness of time."

Good Christians have different opinions about the doctrine of predestination or election. That's okay. But it gives us a lot of hope and gratitude, and joy when we understand the proactive love of God.

I know that we are uncomfortable with the idea that God chooses to work in the hearts of some people and not others. We pray desperately for our friends and family who do not believe in Jesus. Why do we pray? Because we know that God must do

something before they will believe. God must do something in their heart and mind first.

I want to look at some of the verses from today's scripture passage again. I want you to pay attention to the verbs.

Ephesians 1:3-8

Verse 3 "God blessed us in Christ"

Verse 4 "he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world,"

Verse 5 "In love he predestined us for adoption to himself"

Verse 6 "he has blessed us in the Beloved."

Verses 7 and 8 "the riches of his grace he lavished upon us"

Who is acting in these sentences? God is the active person who works in our lives. Think about the apostle Paul who wrote the letter we are reading today. His name was previously Saul. Saul was an enemy of Christians and put them in prison. He approved of their execution. Saul was an expert in the Bible. But Saul would remain blind to the gospel, unless God gave him eyes to see Jesus as Savior. And then Jesus appeared to Saul and a bright light knocked him off his horse. The Holy Spirit opened the eyes of Saul. God renamed him Paul and he became the author of most of the New Testament. But first God had to do something. Paul could not change his own mind, unless God first changed his heart.

God chose Paul, instead of other Pharisees in Jerusalem. God chose Jacob, and not his brother Esau. God chose David to be king and ignored his older brothers. I'm sure that David's brothers didn't like the fact that the youngest and smallest of them all became king.

Why did God choose those men and not the others? I don't know. Why did God save me and not members of my family who I love? I don't know. But this truth is helpful to me when I share the gospel with my family members. If they can believe without God's help, then there is a lot of pressure on me and on them. Do you see that?

If it is possible for my uncle to become a Christian by human effort, then I will try to explain the gospel perfectly. And I will think that I failed if my uncle does not believe. But if I know that only God can change his heart, then I will pray. Yes, I will share the gospel with my uncle. But I share the gospel with hope and confidence in the Lord. Because God can use my prayers and my words about Jesus to change my uncle's heart. The results depend on God, not on me. And that gives me great peace and hope.

## **Point 2. Chosen children love other people.**

Believing that God chose us to be his children helps our relationships with other people. Especially people who are different than us. If you deserved salvation, even a little bit, then you might think you are better than other people. Did God compare you with other people and decide you were more qualified to be his child? No.

Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:26–31.

26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise.

And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

30 God has united you with Christ Jesus.

For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself.

Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

31 Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

Did God evaluate your behavior and decide you deserved to be saved? No. Did he see others who had worse behavior, and decide they were not qualified? No. God chose foolish sinners like us.

Do you think that non-Christians are less intelligent, or less sinful than you? I know you don't think that. But if you think you chose God, then you will be tempted to feel superior to other people who didn't make that choice. However, if you know that you were undeserving, foolish, and weak when God chose you, then you are superior to nobody. This is very helpful to understand in a church like One Voice Fellowship. When we have conflict with each other, we can remember that God made us brothers and sisters.

How many of you chose your family members? Did you go on Amazon.com and search for "good brother" or "great sister"?

No. We do not get to choose our parents or our siblings. But we do have a choice. We can choose to love and accept our siblings who are given to us. This church family includes people from every corner of the world. We have different customs, and preferences, and sinful habits. We are going to offend and frustrate each other. We will experience friction.

1 John 3:16 says this:

16 "We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us.

So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters."

God does not choose people who deserve his love. If he did, there would be no children of God at all! But the love of God is so great, that he chooses unlovable sinful people and gives them eyes to see their sin and hearts to believe in Jesus.

We have seen this teaching in Ephesians 1. We heard it from Jesus in John's gospel. We saw it in Psalm 80. Now listen to these promises from God from an Old Testament prophet in Ezekiel 36:24–27.

God says: 24 "I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land.

25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.

Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols.

26 And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you.

I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.

27 And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations."

We see the same pattern in Ezekiel that we saw before. Who is the active person in these verses? God is active. We are passive. God is the one who says he will gather his people. God will wash us of filth and sin. God will give us a new heart and new spirit. Ezekiel 26:27 is really important. We know we must follow God's decrees and obey his laws. But verse 27 says, "I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees."

We saw the same thing in Ephesians 1:4.


4"even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."

My friends, our obedience is a result of God's work in us. God first gives us new hearts and a new spirit. After he does that, we begin to live differently. We are not afraid of people who are different. We love everyone, especially in the family of God, even people who are very different.

I said in the beginning that this doctrine of election or predestination can be confusing. Many Christians have different opinions about this. That's okay. Let me ask you these questions, however. Do you believe that God saved you by grace alone? Do you believe that you didn't do anything to deserve salvation? Do you believe that Jesus died to wash you clean of sin and guilt? Do you believe that Jesus lived a perfect life and you get the credit for that perfect life? Good. That is all we ask. We are saved by Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone. Therefore, God is worthy of our trust, and our obedience, and our worship. And we must love one another humbly and generously because that is how we were loved by Jesus. Let's pray to him together

now.

Jesus, you are the Savior who left heaven to rescue us. You didn't have to. But you are the Good Shepherd. You left the 99 to come and rescue me, and my brothers and sisters. We don't understand why you chose to love us and die for us. But we receive your love and salvation with grateful hearts. We pray and sing to you with joy. And we go out into the world to tell others the good news. Because we have confidence that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the hearts and minds of millions of people in the world. He is preparing their hearts to receive the good news with faith. Please save our neighbors and friends and family, for their good and your glory. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

 One Voice Fellowship