

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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January 20, 2008

Predestination and Election

8:30 am, Holy Communion

10:30 am, Holy Communion

The Text: Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

11In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory

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Introduction

I read last week of a Navajo Elder who had become rich because oil had been found on his property. He took all the money and put it in a bank. His banker became familiar with the habits of this old gentleman. Every once in a while the elder would show up at the bank and say to the banker, "The grass is all gone, the sheep are all sick, and the water holes are all dry." The banker wouldn't say a word -- he knew what needed to be done. He'd bring the old man inside and seat him in the vault. Then he'd bring out several bags of silver dollars and say, "These are yours." The old man would spend about an hour in there looking at his money, stacking up the dollars and counting them. Then he'd come out and say, "The grass is all green, the sheep are all well, the water holes are all full." He was simply reviewing his resources, and upon concluding his review, his perspective would be changed, even though the circumstances on the land had not.

Well this morning we are going to enter into the vault that we call the Letter to the Ephesians and look at the Spiritual Resources that are available to us because of our life in Christ. Just as the oil in the ground made that Navajo elder rich, St. Paul wants us to understand that when we know what it means to live our lives in Christ, we are endowed with spiritual blessing through faith. Throughout chapters 1-3 St. Paul will help us to examine these blessings in turn. As we review them now, as they are presented in verses 4-14 of chapter one, I hope we will be encouraged.

Part 1: Our Spiritual Blessings

Last week I just highlighted these seven-fold blessings which Paul delineates for us here. What I want to do this morning is look at the first two in more detail and then explain how blessings 3-7 will be examined in chapters 2 and 3

You will notice that the seven-fold blessings are Trinitarian.

As we examine verses 3-6, notice these are blessings that come to us from God the Father. There are two blessings described here.

1. The first is a two sided coin. Our election and predestination.

2. The second is the Father's acceptance of us as his sons and daughters.

In verses 7-11 the blessings considered focus on Jesus. Here there are three blessings celebrated:

1. We have redemption in Christ, the Remission of our Sin.
2. In Christ the mystery of God's will has been made known to us.
3. There is a cosmic unity that Jesus is in the process of accomplishing, of which we are already partakers.

In verses 12-14 we concentrate on the blessings received from the Holy Spirit. They are two:

1. The Spirit is like the banker who shows us our inheritance
2. The Holy Spirit confirms for us that this inheritance is indeed ours.

Let's now take the blessings that come from God the Father and look at them in detail. They are foundational to all that follows.

Part 2: Blessings from the Father:

2.i) *Our election and Predestination:* This is described at verse four where Paul tells us: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."

What does Paul mean when he says we have been chosen in Christ. The theological term for this idea is the doctrine of election and predestination. These two words, are like to respective sides of a coin. They are a unity that can only be understood when both sides of the coin are examined.

The doctrine of election and predestination has been one that some people have found a stumbling block. The reason for this is how it has at times been understood. Some have argued that God is all knowing. Therefore in his omnipotence and sovereignty, God foreknew, even before the Fall, those who would accept him and those who would reject him. Because of this foreknowledge he predestined some to inherit eternal life and others to be predestined for damnation. The conclusion reached by those who espouse this view is that God only set his love on the first group, those predestined to inherit eternal life. On those who are the reprobate, he looks on with judgment.

Those who object to this understanding of election say that if this is how God works I don't want to have anything to do with him. It is such a cold, impersonal and calculating process that is heartless that presents God as a kind dysfunctional earthly father, whose favouritism is the worst form of discrimination.

However this is not what Paul means by election and predestination. What Paul asserts is the following. God decided to make the world so that people in the world could share in his joy. This is what Paul means when he says we were "elected before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him." It is also the understanding we receive from the Parable in Luke 15, where the Father wanted the younger son to share in the full riches of the estate.

But because of the son's willful rebellion, as the Lucan story describes it, the Father has to contemplate the prospect that world can go wrong. It is here that the curtain is parted and the scripture allows us to look in specific detail at God the Father in action.

Even though the world has gone terribly wrong, it is in this situation God chooses to save a great multitude. The marvel is that he chooses to save anyone at all. But love is the Father's nature, and as Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:4:

4 God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

As you perhaps already know none of us deserves anything except condemnation. By rights we would all be in hell and no one would be saved. Or to put it in another way, none of us could return home and be welcomed. By rights we deserve to be left out on the street.

But as Jesus so wonderfully shows us in the parable, God does not give us our rights. God is love and because he is our Father, he shows mercy. He shows mercy not because he has an abstract interest in having two sorts of people. That is some who are saved and others who are condemned. He chooses to save a great multitude because he loves each single one of them.

When we respond to God's grace, it is like the light that comes through to everyone who opens their eyes first thing in the morning and sleep stops and consciousness returns. Along with your consciousness of everything around you, you are conscious of the light. The teaching of Romans 1 is that along with a consciousness of the world around you,

God created us to be conscious of the creator. It is inescapable once you come into a realization of God's presence and activity in the world generally and through the Cross specifically.

However it is a fact that out in the world that fallen human nature is working itself in such a way that people receive the light of God and they shut their eyes to it. People turn the light into darkness and carry on regardless. This does not mean that the light of God calling people to humble themselves before the creator has not come through. It has. And yet the heart can remain hard and closed to the Father's heart. Those who know their election have, like the younger Son, come home. They know what it is to live in the Father's grace and mercy.

Now we need to say one thing more about election. To better understand the meaning of this wonderful word, it is necessary to do a little grammar work. The verb "chose us" in the Greek is "eklegomai." This is the only instance of this verb in Ephesians but it is foundational for all that follows. This verb means "to choose or select." Significantly Paul uses the Middle Voice for this, which means "to choose or select for ones self."

This is significant. You may vote for a mayor. You would use the active voice for that, "eklego". But if you choose a bride you would use the middle voice. This is because you are choosing for her for yourself.

Paul wants us to understand that to know our election means that we have come into that place of know that God has chosen us for himself.

However we realize that not all people do know of their election. Why is this? Well here we need to turn to two verses of Jesus' teaching. In John 6:44 he tells us: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." That's putting it plainly, isn't it? You can't come to Christ unless you are drawn by the Father. God has to initiate the activity. But in Matthew 11 Jesus makes his appeal directly to the will of the individual, saying, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And that means it's up to you. You can never become a Christian until you choose to come.

Again, let us think about the Parable for this morning. The older son was also chosen. The Father says as much when he reminds him that everything that is mine is yours as well. And yet this older Son cannot see it. He is bitter and resentful towards his younger brother and so in

consequence cannot accept the truthful words his father is speaking to him.

So while it was the Father's will for both sons to know their election, the older one rejects his Father's generosity.

The Christian is that person who knows that they are elected. With this election they also come to realize that they have been predestined to be holy and blameless before God. But this is something that grows out of our knowing we are elected.

2.ii) Our Character: Now when Paul says that we have been predestined to be holy, he does not mean perfect. Nor is he invoking a holier than thou attitude. By holy he means "Whole" Again when we think of the returning son in the parable, as he returned home he was made whole again because he was embraced within the loving arms of his father.

To be blameless does not mean that we are sinless. Again, think of the younger son. He was someone whose actions had hurt and violated his father. But as he returns home ready to make his peace with dad, he is filled with shame and personal blame. However, Jesus tells us that the Father cuts him short and will not let him make his speech. In the story the son isn't even given the opportunity to apologize. The father shows him such kindness and forgiveness that the experience of blame is eclipsed by the realization of acceptance.

Most people refuse to think of themselves as blameless because they know that they have done many things for which they ought properly to be blamed. That is, they have made choices, deliberately, against the Light, against knowledge of the results. They have purposely done that which they knew they ought not to have done. They could have done otherwise but didn't. And who is not in that boat? Therefore they feel they are to be blamed. But they are confusing this word with another, because it is not *sinless*. Never having done anything wrong is sinlessness. But you can be sinful and still be blameless. Do you know how? By handling your sin in the right way.

If you did something that injured someone else, and the full result of it was not visible to you when you did it but afterward you saw how much you had hurt the person, and you acknowledged it, apologized to them, did what you could to restore it, then there would be nothing further you could do, would there? And from that point on you would

be blameless. You would not be sinless -- you still did it -- but you also did all you could to handle it rightly.

The idea is the same with our offenses against God. What can you do about your sins, your evil? You can't go back and straighten it all out, no, but you can accept his forgiveness. You can acknowledge your need. You can put it back into his capable hands to straighten out the results. And when you've done that, you're blameless! God has chosen us to do -- to learn this wonderful process of being whole and blameless. Notice that these things are to be reckoned true even though we don't feel that way. That is the way it is in nature also.

You get up in the morning and look at the sun and say, "The sun rose this morning." It looks as though the sun were traveling around the earth. But you know better than that, don't you? You look out across the landscape and it looks flat, and you say, "The earth must be flat." No, you know better. Even though you can't see that the earth is round and revolves around the sun, you have learned to accept these facts despite your feelings and the seeming evidence.¹

That is exactly what we are called on to do here. Accept the fact that God chose you in Christ to make you holy and blameless. And as you walk before him in his prescribed way, that is what you are. And then rejoice in that great fact. Now look at the second great aspect which is recorded of the work of the Father, and which is related to the first,

In love 5he^[c] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Again we go back to the Parable. Both the younger and older son had lost sight of their relationship to the Father. The younger son, through willful disobedience and the older son through grudging obedience no longer believed that they had an important place in the Father's home.

However we know from the parable that Jesus conveyed clearly that this was not the case at all from the Father's perspective. He was delighted to welcome the younger son back into the family and wanted to older son to know that he was an integral part of the family.

I love how in Ephesians Paul says that it is in accordance with God's pleasure and will to have us in his family. May we contemplate this

¹ The ideas in the preceding paragraphs are taken from: The Foundations By: Ray C. Stedman
Series: Riches in Christ Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14 Message No: 2 Catalog No: 3002 Date: July 30, 1972.
<http://www.raystedman.org/ephesians/3002.html>

wonderful truth as we look into the rest of the blessings we have in God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in the weeks to come.

Application:

Living as those who are elected and predestined.

So here is an application of what it means for us to live as those who are elected and predestined.

One of the images the Bible uses to talk about God shaping us into those who are holy and blameless is the analogy of a potter and clay. The Father is the potter and we are the clay.

Now when a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it sings it is ready. If it thuds it's placed back in the oven.

The character of a person is checked by thumping.

Have you been thumped lately?

Late night phone calls, grouchy teachers, grumpy moms, tired dads, burnt meals and flat tires, 'you have got to be kidding deadlines', Visa bills, dentists bills, Leaky toilets, furnace malfunctions, and on it goes. These are thumps. They are those irritating inconveniences that trigger the worst in us. They catch us off guard and flat footed.

They are not big enough to be crises, but if you get enough of them watch out.

How do you respond? Do I sing or thud?

There is nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of the heart. For Jesus said out of the overflow of the heart the person speaks. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day to day living.

Thank God for the thumps. I don't mean a half hearted thank you. I mean a rejoicing jumping for joy thank you for the bottom of your heart. Because you are elected and predestined to be holy and blameless we understand that God is involved in the thumping. Every thump is a reminder that God is molding you.

Learn from each thump. Face up to the fact that you are not thump proof. You are going to be tested for the rest of your life in this world. You might as well learn from the thumps. Look upon every inconvenience as an opportunity to recall your true identity as a child of the Father. Ask him to help you in the thumping to grow in holiness as you learn patience and persistence. Each thump will help you or hurt you, depending on how you use it.

Be aware of thump slump times. Know your pressure periods. What are the times during the week when you can anticipate an unusual amount of thumping? ²

As we do this and remember who were, are as those elected by the Father to live before him in love, may we become ever more conscious, to live before him as those who are called to be holy and blameless. Such an insight can help us when we face that traffic jam, long line at Safeway or countless other thumps that confront us as we live in this world.

But when thumped, like the Navajo Elder we can review our blessings and say:

"The grass is all green, the sheep are all well, the water holes are all full."

A Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for these vast truths. We pray that our understanding may be made equal to them. We can't grasp them properly apart from the work of your Spirit, and we pray that you will open our eyes and help us to see that these things are true indeed, that they undergird our lives. And as we venture out upon them, as we dare to apply them to ourselves, you will take them and make them lead us into the liberty of the children of God, so that we will be free men and women, free despite the circumstances under which we live, and despite the people with whom we have to work. We are a free people. We thank you in Jesus' name, Amen.

² Max Lucado On the Anvil 1985 Pages 51-53