

The Ephesians Series
SOVEREIGN SELECTION (PART ONE)

Ephesians 1:1-14

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Like many of you this past week I watched a little bit of the Democratic debates, and as I watched I was struck with the fact that they were asking us to elect them. They were essentially saying, "Choose me." It was fascinating to me studying this week, for Ephesians 1, as I watched and related the connection between the request to elect them, versus the divine Biblical doctrine of election. In both cases, a choice had to be made. And it's to that incredible rich and profound doctrine of election that we come this morning in our study of Ephesians 1. I invite you to turn there with me. Ephesians 1.

After a brief greeting, Paul normally begins most of his letters with a thanksgiving and prayer for the people to whom he writes. If you've read any of the New Testament at all, you've noted that as he begins, he thanks God for the people, and he prays for them. And here, in his letter to Ephesians--the Ephesian church--Paul will eventually get there, but before he does, he erupts, as it were, in this kind of outburst of praise that begins in verse 3 and runs down through verse 14. Twelve verses. Those twelve verses are, as I've told you before, just one Greek sentence. And in this one sentence is some of Paul's most breath-taking theology. In this sentence, not only does Paul express his own heart in praise and thanksgiving, but he also teaches us. He wants us to come to grips with the reality of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. If you're here this morning and you're a Christian--you're a follower of Jesus Christ--this is what Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, wanted you to understand about your salvation.

The theme of this impossibly long sentence, beginning in verse 3 and running through verse 14, is this: God is worthy of all of our praise and all of our thanksgiving because of all that He has done for us in Jesus Christ. That's really the theme that will occupy the first half of this letter--the first three chapters--chapters 1, 2, and 3. Now as you look at this opening sentence, remember how we outlined it. There are really three stanzas here, marked by a repeating refrain. You'll remember the first time we meet the refrain is in verse 6: "To the praise of the glory of His grace." You see it again in verse 12: "To the praise of His glory." And then finally at the end of verse 14: "To the praise of His glory." Those three expressions of praise help us outline this very long and difficult sentence. And each section that's marked by those refrains focuses on one member of the Trinity and of that member's part in your salvation. In verses 4 through 6 we find the Father's role in this eternal plan of redemption. The Father is the one who blesses and who chooses. In verses 7 through 12 we see the Son's role in the eternal plan of redemption. The Son is the one by whom the blessings were purchased. All of the blessings that are yours were purchased by the Son. And then in verses 13 and 14 we see the Spirit's role in that great eternal plan to save you. The Spirit is the one by whom the blessings are personally applied.

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Today, we begin to look at the Father's role. What exactly is it that the Father has done in this great sweeping drama of redemption? Let me read for you the Father's role, beginning in verse 3. Paul writes "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 would 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." That is the Father's great role in your salvation. Paul begins, you'll notice, in verse 3, by blessing God. That is, by praising and thanking God, because God, in turn, has blessed us. You remember we discovered that the word bless means to say a good word. It comes from the word from which we get our English word eulogy. God has spoken a good word about you. He has said, I am going to pour out blessing upon you; every spiritual blessing. It is a statement of sovereign grace.

Then, in verse 4 running all the way down through verse 14, Paul lists for us the primary spiritual blessings that are ours. He lists the greatest and the most wonderful of the gifts that we have received from God. Notice how he begins in verse 4. He writes 'just as.' That little word is a little confusing. It just means since, or in so far as. It introduces proof. Paul says, listen, I have told you that God has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Let me give you proof. Just as--and then what follows through the rest of the sentence is in reality a list of how we have been blessed; the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. So, with that little expression, 'just as' that begins verse 4, Paul begins his list of the great spiritual blessings that are ours. And notice he begins the list with exhibit A, in eternity past, sovereign election, or as we could paraphrase it, and as I've entitled today's message: sovereign selection. Because that is, in reality, what we're talking about.

Now, if you were to ask a group of average Christians why they have come to enjoy all the spiritual blessings that are theirs in Christ, you would get a variety of answers. In fact, let me ask you that question. If you're a believer this morning, what would be your answer to this question: why do you enjoy all the spiritual blessings that are yours? Some might say, well it's because of Christ's death. It's because Jesus died in my place that I have come to enjoy the benefits that I enjoy. Others would probably say that the cause was their faith, their believing. They would say I have come to believe in Jesus Christ. I've received Him as my Lord and my Savior. I've accepted Christ. It is in that act of faith that I came to enjoy those benefits, those blessings. Still others might say, no, I received those blessings because of God's unmerited favor, because of God's grace. And all of those answers would be right answers. They would be true answers. But when Paul answers the question of how we came to receive all the spiritual blessings that are ours, he goes back before you trusted in Christ. He goes back before Christ died. He goes back before the world ever existed. He goes back into eternity, before there was time, before there was space, before there was matter, before there was anything but God, to a time when there was absolutely nothing but God. That's where he begins the story of redemption. He says the story of redemption begins in eternity past with a decision by God. Let me be more specific. Paul begins your story and mine with an act of God in eternity. If you're a Christian--listen carefully--your spiritual biography did not begin the day you trusted in Jesus Christ. Nor did it begin the day that you began to sense your sin and be convicted by your sin. Your spiritual biography,

Paul says, began at one moment in eternity past in the councils of the triune God, with sovereign election, with a divine choice.

Now, I don't have to say this. You understand this. In our day this is a doctrine that stirs a lot of debate--a lot of discussion. Most of it with much heat and very little light. When it comes to election, some Christians would just as soon ignore it. Others, on the other hand, so overemphasize election until they actually neglect their clear Christian duties, like the duty of evangelism. But only a very few Christians, a small minority, deny that there is such a thing as election in any form; because whether we like it or not, folks, it's here. It's in the Bible. It's here in Ephesians 1:4. So we need to have some view--some interpretation--of what it means. And more than that, we need to know what God meant when He said that we were elect. We must let go of our prejudices and what we think, and what we have been taught; and we must ask instead what I always encourage us to ask--what does the Bible say? Now as we begin our study of this passage, we have to avoid two extremes. Let me just warn you of them.

On the one hand, there's the extreme of ignoring or denigrating, of undervaluing the truth that's taught here. Some Christians just figure, look, the whole thing is too controversial, it's too divisive, it's too mentally taxing for me to pour out much energy; so let's just ignore it and just pretend that it doesn't exist and live our Christian lives, and hope it goes away. We can't respond that way. Paul didn't think like that. In fact, Paul thought this doctrine of election was so important that he begins his letter to the Ephesian church and the surrounding churches with this issue. Remember, he'd been with them for three years, and yet when he writes them, the very first place he goes is this doctrine. That means that the Holy Spirit in His perfect wisdom knew that understanding God's choice of us was foundational to our Christian lives and to our spiritual growth. It's not something peripheral. It's not something you can take or leave. It's absolutely crucial. Paul begins the letter to the Ephesians with it. That's one extreme to be avoided. Ignoring it--undervaluing it.

But we must also avoid the other extreme, and that's trying to understand more about this truth than God Himself has revealed. One writer put it this way. "Just as we ought to follow the guidance of the Spirit; where He leaves us, we ought to stop there. If anyone will seek to know more than what God has revealed, he shall be overwhelmed with the immeasurable brightness of inaccessible light. But we must bear in mind the distinction between the secret counsel of God and His will made known to us in scripture. For though the whole doctrine of scripture surpasses in its height the mind of man, yet access to it is not closed against the faithful who reverently follow the Spirit." In other words, listen, there's a lot in scripture. You can understand it through the help of the Spirit. But, with regard to God's hidden counsel, the depth and height of it cannot be reached. That warning comes to us by way of the pen of John Calvin. And it's one that we have to heed. We stop where the Bible stops. But on the other hand, there is so much that the scripture does reveal about this doctrine. And it's there for whomever will expend the effort to look. Now, I realize, as I begin our study of election, that there are different types of Christians who are here this morning. Different ideas and thoughts about this whole issue.

It may be that you are here this morning, and you are essentially uninformed about election. You've never really heard it taught; you don't understand what it's about; you're kind of wondering with somewhat of a quizzical spirit what's going on. It's my prayer that you will be

profoundly enriched over the next couple of weeks and that many of your questions about this truth will be answered. Perhaps, this morning, you find yourself here, and for you, since you came to faith in Christ, the doctrine of election has become a treasured and favorite friend. I hope, by the time we're done, we will dig a little deeper together, and we will come to grasp this great doctrine in an even richer and fuller way. But I'm sure there are also some here, and perhaps you are here this morning, and you have always been taught that sovereign election is a blight on the character of God. It is a teaching that ought to be entirely avoided. All I ask of you is that you check what I say against the scripture. If what I teach isn't in the text we examine together, then don't receive it. But if it is, then you must deal with it. I understand if you are a little unsettled about even the whole issue. I have been, in the past. I have not always accepted, liked, or understood sovereign election. I grew up in a Southern Baptist Church, where, as best I can remember, I never even heard the word election. I went to a Christian college after I was saved as a senior in high school, and at the Christian college I attended, such issues were downplayed by most as divisive. I began to read, however, some of the greatest writers in the history of the Christian church, and I had a few instructors, including my father-in-law, who began to expose me to what the Bible teaches about this issue. Once I reached graduate school, through my own reading and study, and through some excellent faculty members, I finally came to understand the doctrine of election. So I encourage you, this morning, to let go of any fears, any pre-dispositions, and just let the scripture speak for itself.

That brings us back to Ephesians 1. In Ephesians 1:4-6, Paul outlines for us several features of divine election. Now, it is impossible for me to adequately cover all that the Spirit has compressed into these verses about election in a single message. You know that. That's not a shock to you. So we will only begin to examine this great doctrine together today. And as I do that, let me give you this caveat. Because it's going to be over several messages, if I don't answer your question or address your concern today, please stay with me over the next couple of weeks. I hope, by the time we're done, to deal with every question that is typically raised about this issue. Now, with that rather long introduction, let's examine the first feature of election that Paul identifies in this passage.

The first feature of election is this: election is sovereign. Let's look together today at just the first two words of the clause. "He chose." That's as far as we're going to get today. Now, the importance of those two words cannot be overstated. Notice the personal pronoun He. By the way, in the Greek text there's just one word, because in Greek the pronoun is an ending on the verb. And so it's one word, but it basically says in Greek, as it says in English, "He chose." Here is a reference to the one who does the electing. Who is it? Well, the pronoun He obviously refers back to verse 3. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're talking about the Father, the first member of the trinity. He chose. Now what is it that He actually did when it says He chose us? Well, the word 'chose' means to pick, to single out from a group, to select, to choose. The Greek word translated 'chose' occurs some 139 times in the Septuagint--in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. And in the New Testament, the verb occurs about twenty-two times, seven of those times in reference to salvation, the other times in reference to normal life and choosing of various kinds. Seven times, though, the verb occurs concerning salvation. The noun 'elect' occurs twenty-two times in the New Testament and seventeen of those refer to spiritual salvation. Another form of the word occurs seven times, is usually translated 'election,' or depending on your translation 'choice,' or 'choosing.' We're not

going to look at every one of those occurrences, but let me just give you a summary. When you look at that family of words that I've just talked about: to 'choose,' to 'select,' to 'pick,' to 'single out from a group,' are all definitions of the word. When you examine that word group, noun and verb alike in its various contexts, language experts note several observations that can be made. We need to understand this word because this is foundational. Here's what you find when you find that word being used. First of all you find the choice is always made with a knowledge of all the options.

For example, Lot, in the Old Testament, in the Septuagint, it says that Lot chose Sodom and Gomorrah. You remember Lot. He looked around. He was given the opportunity by Abraham to look around and see which piece of land he wanted. And he looked around and he surveyed everything his eye could see, and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and he saw the plains there. They were beautiful, they were fertile, and he said, that's what I want. Implied in this word is a knowledge of all the options, just as Lot had. A second thing that's implied in this word group is that the ones or things chosen have no legal right to be chosen. It's not like they have some demand that they can make to be chosen. Thirdly, and very interesting, the most frequent subject of this verb is God Himself. God is the one most often said to choose. And then, finally--and this is very interesting--this word 'to choose' in Greek implies personal interest. In fact we could translate it like this: He chose for Himself. In other words, the choice was intensely personal, rather than impersonal, or sort of random. So, putting all of that together then, in reference to salvation, we could say this: God selected individual sinners with full knowledge of all the options, and not because the ones He chose were better or had any personal right to be chosen, but He did so for Himself, and to the salvation of the ones chosen. That's what the word study of the word 'chose' gives us.

Now with that in mind, let's move on to a basic definition. Here's what election means. Here's how to define election. I don't think Louis Berkhof's definition can be improved upon. In his *Systematic Theology* he writes this: "Election is that eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no unforeseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be recipients of special grace, and of eternal salvation." Let me read that to you again, and listen carefully. "It is an eternal act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no unforeseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of people to be recipients of special grace, and of eternal salvation." You say, is that what the Bible teaches? There are so many passages that drive home this great reality. Let's look at a few of them together.

I want you to turn to Romans 8 to begin our journey. Romans 8:29-30, I read for you earlier, have been called the golden chain of salvation. Notice where it begins, "For those whom [God] foreknew." Stop there for a moment. Now when we see the word foreknow, we immediately think that simply means to know something before it happens--to have an awareness of it before it occurs, but that's not what the Greek word means. It has a special sense. It has a sense of to select before, to plan before, to predetermine. In fact, that's how it's used in Acts 2:23. You remember where it's talking about Christ? It says Christ was given over, surrendered over, by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. In the Greek text, what's interesting is, there's a Greek construction there that makes those two equal. It's called the Granville Sharp rule. I won't go into all the details, but let me just tell you this. It makes it clear that pre-

determined plan and foreknowledge mean the same thing. They are used in an equivalent way. That means that foreknowledge means more than to know before, it means to plan before. God planned whom He would know. He planned whom He would know in a special way--whom He would have a relationship with. He preplanned that relationship. So those whom He foreknew--it's essentially the equivalent to election--He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son. And then he goes on to say, and those whom He predestined, He called. We studied this several months ago on Sunday nights. This is what is called the effectual call. This is God actually calling you to Himself. Sometimes sinners hear the gospel and they don't respond. They hear the words but it makes no difference in their lives, they don't respond to it. That's an external call. The effectual call is when you heard the gospel and you actually responded to it. That was God affecting you with the gospel. It was the effectual call, effecting in you a response. Those whom He called He also justified. So when He called you to Himself, He declared you righteous in Jesus Christ, and those whom He declared righteous in Christ, He will also glorify. And he used here the tense that implies that it's already occurred because it's such a reality. It's going to happen. It's certain. There's the golden chain. It starts with foreknowing. With pre-determining to love, and it ends up with glorification. And it's all linked together and cannot be broken. Those whom He foreknew will eventually be glorified. It can't be changed.

Romans 11. I'm skipping Romans 9. I know it's the most expounded, the most common passage used to defend election, and we will go there, but not today. It is crucial to understand, but we're not going to go there today. I want you to turn to Romans 11. In verse 5, just to give you the context here, Paul is talking about Israel and why Israel is not saved. He says, "In the same way then, there is also come to be at the present time a remnant." In other words, most Jews, he said, don't believe. That was true in Paul's day. That's what he was saying. Most of my Jewish brethren don't believe in their Messiah. However, there is a remnant, that is, there's a small number. Why? It is according to God's gracious choice. Verse 6. "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." In other words, it's the fact that God chooses that makes it gracious. If it were any other basis than God's choosing, it would be works. Verse 7. "What then? What Israel is seeking." What is Israel seeking? You have to go all the way back to chapter 10 verse 3 to find out what they're seeking. They're seeking their own righteousness. What they are seeking, verse 7 of chapter 11 says, "it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened."

Turn over to 1 Thessalonians 1:4. Paul begins by thanking God for these people and praying for them, and in verse 4 he says, "knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you." He chose you for--notice verse 5, here is how Paul knows they have been chosen--"for our gospel did not come to you in word only [in other words it wasn't just striking your ears], but it came to you in power and in the Holy Spirit," and you were fully convinced of it. You had full conviction of its truth. This is how you know if you're elect. Do you respond to the gospel? Do you believe it? Do you embrace it with full conviction? Over to the second letter to the Thessalonian church--2 Thessalonians 2, and this passage is absolutely crucial because it tells us the means. As I often tell you, the God who decrees the ends decrees the means, and here we're told the means in which election is carried out. 2 Thessalonians 2:13. "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, [why?] because God has chosen you from the beginning." Of course we learned in Ephesians 1, even before time, they were chosen. So from the very beginning they were chosen, but notice God has chosen you for salvation. Election is unto

salvation. You were chosen to be saved. And how does it happen? What are the means God uses? Through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. Now, sometimes, when you read the word sanctification it's talking about the process by which we're made more and more like Christ. Progressive sanctification. That's not how it's used here. Here it's used definitively. It speaks of the time when you and I were set apart from sin unto God by the Spirit. At the moment of our salvation we became saints, set apart to God. So here's how it happened. We were elected in eternity past to be saved, and we were saved through being set apart by the Spirit and by believing in the truth. That's how it happened.

Turn over to Peter. In his epistles, 1 Peter 1:1, Peter makes the same point as the apostle Paul. He begins his letter to those in Asia Minor. He says "to those...who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." What does that mean? Does that mean God knew something about them, or does it mean more? Well, look down at verse 20 and you see the word foreknow used in a different context. It gives you a little more idea of its meaning. Verse 20, "For He was," speaking of Christ here as the perfect sacrifice, verse 19 says--a lamb unblemished and spotless, "for He was foreknown." Christ "was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you." You see what Peter is saying? He's saying that Christians are foreknown for salvation in the same way that Christ was foreknown as the ultimate sacrifice. Now you tell me, in eternity past, did God just know that Jesus was going to be the sacrifice, or did He determine it. That's exactly, then, what it means in verse 1 and verse 2. You are chosen according to the pre-determination of God the Father. God is not merely aware of our salvation before it happens. He planned it before it happened. He pre-engineered it to happen. You, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ and you sit here this morning, you have been chosen by God. You have been sovereignly selected by God. Now, if this is the first time you had ever read Ephesians 1, three words would jump out at you. "He chose us." And your initial response would probably be something like, wait a minute, I thought I chose God. What does it mean, He chose me? And this immediately raises a very important question. And that is, why does God need to choose me? Can't I choose Him? Didn't I choose Him? Why is election even necessary? This is an absolutely crucial question, because lying behind election is a basic pre-supposition. The human race is fallen and sinful. And as such, every single person, you included, have no capacity to choose God. That's exactly what the Bible teaches. It's called total depravity. That's how far man fell when Adam sinned. Total depravity is the core issue that lies behind God choosing.

Martin Luther understood this. When Luther wrote what he believed was his magnum opus, *The Bondage of the Will*, and by the way if you've never read *The Bondage of the Will*, it's what sparked the reformation. I encourage you to read it. It was, as Benjamin Warfield said, the Magna Carta, or the manifesto of the reformation. Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will*, and he confronted Erasmus about this very issue--the Dutch humanist, Erasmus. Luther saw it as the battle for the heart of the gospel. This is crucial as to why there needs to be election. Listen carefully. Erasmus was chosen by the Roman Church to attack Luther and the reformers. He was basically a hired gun. He wrote what he called a diatribe, or a discussion concerning free will. Luther responded with *The Bondage of the Will*. Now, why is it--listen carefully, stay with me, I know this is heavy sledding but stay with me--why did Erasmus decide to make the freedom of the will the point at which he attacked Luther? If you were going to attack Luther, where would you attack him? Well, Erasmus chose the freedom of the will. Why would you

make that the issue? Well, listen to Luther's explanation. This is great. This is from *The Bondage of the Will*. He says to Erasmus "I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account, that you alone, in contrast with all the others, have attacked the real thing that is the essential issue." He says, listen, Erasmus, you understood the heart of what this whole debate is all about. You have not wearied me with those extraneous issues about the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like--trifles rather than issues, in respect of which almost all today have sought my blood--and then he adds: though without success. You and you alone have seen the hinge on which all turns. You have aimed for the vital spot. Luther said you get it Erasmus, you understand. You understand what the reformation is all about. It all comes down to your will. The crux of the differences between them centered on this basic question. To what extent is your will affected by sin? Erasmus defended the position that you still have the capacity in you, as a fallen sinner, to respond to God. Luther believed that man's will was irreparably damaged, and that no one, including you, has the capacity to choose God. He argues that from many texts, but perhaps the text that puts it most succinctly is John 6, and I want you to turn there. This is absolutely crucial because this is why election is necessary. This is why God needs to choose, versus our choosing.

John 6. This comes from the mouth of our Lord. John 6:41. The Jews were grumbling about Jesus because He said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They're saying, wait a minute, isn't this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How does He say I've come down from heaven? Listen to Jesus' response, John 6:43. "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.'" Think about that for a moment. Take that apart. Let's start with no one. No one—a universal categorical negative. There is no exception. No one, without exception, can. You see that word 'can'? In English as in Greek, it implies ability. To have the ability--to have the power. 'Dunomi' is the Greek word.

It's like our difference between may and can in English. You remember your mother teaching you this. My mother was always after me on this. I'd say, "Mom, can I have something to eat?" She'd say, "Now wait a minute, let me explain something to you. Can I is a question of ability, of power. May I is to ask permission. You want to ask that again?" which I always did because I wanted something to eat so badly. Now, look at verse 44 again. The same thing is true in Greek and English. "No one, without exception, has the ability or power to come to me." Now, what does that mean? Well, this is Christ's common expression for approaching Him for salvation. No one can come to Me for salvation. No one has the ability or power to come to Me for salvation unless--here's the necessary condition, the only exception--unless the Father draws him. The only way anyone can ever approach Jesus for salvation is if the Father draws him. Now what does it mean, to draw? Well, this word occurs eight times in the New Testament. According to the definitive Greek lexicon--a series of multi volumes that are on my shelf, *Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, this word essentially means this--to compel by irresistible superiority. In fact, several times in the New Testament it's translated as 'drag.' In Acts 16:19 we're told that they seized and dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities. Dragged is the same word as draw here. In James 2:6, James says the wicked rich are dragging you into court. Dragging is the same word translated draw here. To compel by irresistible superiority.

“Unless the Father compels you by irresistible superiority no one can approach me for salvation.” What Jesus was saying was crystal clear. No human being, without exception, has the power or ability to approach Jesus for salvation unless the Father irresistibly compels him to come. That doesn't mean the Father drags us kicking and screaming to Christ. It doesn't mean He drags us against our will. It means that He changes our wills. That He makes us willing. He draws us by making us willing to come. This is why we don't and can't choose God. Left to ourselves, we would have never chosen God. We would have never sought God. Isn't that what Paul says in Romans 3:11? “There is none who seeks for God.” You say, wait a minute, what about all those people out there in religion? Aren't they seeking God? God says, “No, they're not seeking. They're running. They're running from the knowledge of Myself that I've put in their hearts. They're running into all kinds of error. No one seeks.” There is none who would have chosen God. Do you understand that? If God had left you to yourself, you would never have chosen Him. So, instead, in an amazing display of grace, Christian, God chose you. That's why election must be the sovereign choice of God. Because if He didn't choose us, we would never have chosen Him. Paul says here's how all those spiritual blessings that you enjoy started. He chose us.

Now, if you're here this morning, and you know in your heart of hearts that you're not a true follower of Jesus Christ--I mean, I don't care what you claim, I don't care what you told the person sitting next to you--but you know in your heart, there's no love for Christ. You've never really turned from your sin. You still want your own way. You're a rebel this morning, against God. When you hear the word election, don't be scared by that. Don't ask yourself--oh no, does this mean there's no hope for me? Listen, the only thing you need to do to know if you're elect is simply surrender to Jesus Christ. All you need to do is turn from your sin and embrace Him as your Lord and your Savior. Give yourself to Him and that will guarantee that you were chosen before the foundation of the world. You don't need to work out election. You need to come to Christ.

If you're a believer this morning, how do you respond to this amazing truth that God chose you? I love the way Lloyd-Jones puts it. He says we should approach the doctrine of election by saying to ourselves something like this. Here I am, in the house of God, while there are thousands of people around me who are not. Who are in their beds, reading the Sunday newspapers, or in our day, watching television, or going out to brunch, or doing a host of other things. Lloyd-Jones says, why am I different? What has made me different? Why am I interested in these things? Why bother myself at all about them? Why am I a Christian? Lloyd-Jones says seriously consider what it is that has put you in a different category. And he says, when you do that, you will always come back to this. He chose us. Election is absolutely sovereign. Never has this been made clearer to me than in the mid 1990s.

Some of you have been in our church a long time, and have heard me tell this story before. I had the chance to go to India. I did a lot of international travel in those days, and I flew for the first time to India. Flew in from Singapore to Calcutta. Arrived in Calcutta, a twelve million-person city, at about 10:30 at night. But it wasn't just any night. It was the night that the holy Muslim month of Ramadan ended, and all of the Muslims were in the streets celebrating the end of that time of “fasting,” and all of those who knew them were out celebrating with them--any excuse to party. And so the streets were literally jammed with people, and we got in this--three large

Americans--got in this tiny little taxi, making our way, sort of inch by inch, foot by foot, through the partying crowds. We ultimately arrived, after a lengthy journey, at the William Carey--the Baptist guesthouse, there in Calcutta. And we put our suitcases into place and found a cot on which to sleep. And I lay down in the middle of the melee that was going on all around outside the open windows. It was after midnight, and here I was, on my bunk, trying to go to sleep, and I just began to sob. Because something hit me as it had never hit me before. I understood it with my mind, but it had never come to rest on my heart the way it did that night. Here I was in the middle of a country of a billion plus people, some of whom had never even heard the name of Jesus, and the vast majority of whom were not Christians. And I was overwhelmed in that situation with this simple thought. Why me? Why me? As I lay there that night, I had my own thanksgiving and praise service because I was overcome with the reality of sovereign election. And that's exactly what happened to Paul in Ephesians 1. As he began to dictate this letter, his heart overflowed with praise for the God who would choose him. He chose us. And may that be the response of all of our hearts, to the reality that we have been chosen by God.

Let's pray together. Our Father, how do we respond to such amazing love? Love that chose us in eternity past to be Your own. Pre-determined to know us. Father, I pray that You would stir our hearts afresh. Help us, even as your Spirit, and the apostle Paul intended, as we study this together. Help us to grow deep in our knowledge of You and who You are, and of the grace that You have shown us in Jesus Christ. Lord, don't let us be content in the shallows of Your word. Help us to plunge out into the depths of what You've accomplished. And Father, change us as a result. May our knowledge of Your love compel us to love You and to serve You and to serve others on Your behalf. To share the gospel. Because as You reminded the apostle, You have many people in this city. We pray it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.