

## **So You Are A Presbyterian**

### **Ephesians 1**

**By Dr. James Baird**

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before Him with joyful singing. Know that the Lord Himself is God. It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him. Bless His name for the Lord is good, His loving kindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness is to all generations. Let us worship Him

*Our Lord and our God, You are faithful, and we have tasted of Your faithfulness, and You deserve our praise. And yet, we would not have rendered it had You not reached out to us in Your love and grace in Jesus Christ and drawn us to Yourself. For this we praise You. We ask, O God, this day that You would reveal Yourself in all Your magnificence in Your word. We pray that our hearts would bow the knee to You so that we would worship You, ascribing to You the glory which is due Your name. We pray that by the Spirit we would worship this day in Spirit and in truth and that You would draw near to meet with us. Comfort those hearts which are weak and weary and peaceless. Fill them with that peace that passes understanding. Convict the hearts of hardened sinners that they might see your glory and Your love displayed in Christ and in the gospel and love You and believe You and worship You. And enable us all, O, triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to render up our voices and prayers in praise to You. For we ask it all through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

What a choir! God bless. Let's open our Bibles to the book of Ephesians, the first chapter of the book of Ephesians. And as you're opening your Bibles, I was on an airplane preparing a sermon. A man sat down next to me and he looked at me and said, "Are you a preacher?" I said, "Yes." He said, "What kind of a preacher are you?" I said, "A good one!" He said, "No, what denomination?" I said, "Presbyterian." He said, "You are one of those predestination fellows." I said, "Yes, I believe in the biblical doctrine of predestination."

That's what our subject matter is here today. Now, you do not have to believe fully in the doctrine of predestination to be a member of this congregation. Your elders and your deacons and all your church staff, they give that vow in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, but I would assume all members, if we don't understand, teach us, because we want to learn.

The apostle Paul is in a Roman prison. He is, in a sense, a political prisoner under Nero for the cause of Christ. All he's got to do is deny Christ, but he refuses to do that, and so he is in a Roman prison, and he is writing back to a congregation in Ephesus. Ephesus is found today in western Turkey. He had been pastor of that church at one time. And he's writing back to that church, and it's often referred to as a church epistle, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, because it is filled with the truth that God has for the church. Let us hear the word of God: chapter one, verse one.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath 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 predestinated 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."

I want to stop there. God give us insight into His grace and into His word. Here's where we're going, folks. Number one, definition. What are we talking about when we say *predestination*. By the way, see, if you're a Presbyterian, like that fellow on the airplane, they just assume that you believe in the doctrine of predestination. They equate Presbyterian to predestination. Number two, how has this doctrine, this truth, effected our lives? And number three, so what? What difference does it make.

Okay, number one. Predestination. Definition: negatively, I'll tell you what it is not. You heard about the Presbyterian walking down the street. He slipped on a banana peel, fell down flat, got up, brushed himself off and said, "Well, I'm glad that that predestinated act is over with." He's not talking about predestination. He's talking about the providence of God. Providence is what is spoken of in Romans 8:28. Predestination is a word that is used in the Scripture only in connection with your salvation. Words that are used to accompany it are words like *He chose* or *the elect*. That's what predestination is. God chose some people to Himself.

Now, there are some who find that idea a little bit objectionable, that He chose some and He did not choose others. I simply point out to you that it is the nature of the God of this Bible. It is His nature to choose. In the Old Testament, when He is going to destroy the people of this earth because of, He chooses one man and his family to save from the flood. A few chapters later, when He's going to start all over again spiritually, He chooses one man and His family, Abraham.

And for the rest of the Old Testament, a period of some at least 1800 years, perhaps even more, the only time the people of the world are ever mentioned is when they come in contact with this man and His family. He chooses Abraham, and they are called in the Old Testament, *the chosen people*.

When you come into the New Testament, the same truth. Now, God is dealing not with a nation, but with people that He has chosen. He calls them *the church*. The church. Jesus said to His disciples when He was in the upper room just before His death, "You did not chose Me. I chose you." in the book of Galatians in the third chapter, it says that we "Are of the seed of Abraham." Not the biological seed, most of us, but the spiritual seed. We have the same kind of faith that Abraham had, and therefore, we are considered a part of the chosen people. We are chosen. We are chosen. That's the whole nature of God in the Bible.

And I want to end this little portion by saying this. We have just returned from a month in Florida preaching to churches down there. And I teased them about the recent election. They all wanted to choose. They all wanted to elect. They all wanted to have their vote counted. Three times. We demand, as Americans, our right to vote, to choose. Why don't we give that same right to God? If we demand it for ourselves, give it to Him. He's a God who chooses.

Now, number two: how does this God who chooses a people, how does He bring this process into our lives? The Bible says it is a mystery. Look at the ninth verse. The ninth verse of our text says "He, God, hath made known to us the mystery of His will according to His kind intention which He purposed in Himself." The mystery that He's talking about, of course, is this whole mystery of salvation or predestination. Now, the word *mystery* in the New Testament does not mean magic, that God's got some kind of magic. He's not some kind of contradiction of facts. The word *mystery* simply means there are truths that the human mind would never come to of itself unless God revealed them. Once God reveals them in the Scripture, now we see it, now it makes sense. But we would never come to it of ourself.

For instance, nobody would ever believe that salvation is based on predestination, chosen from before the foundation of the world. We of ourselves would never would come to that, except it's in the Scripture. That's the mystery of it, and this mystery is linked to the word revelation.

For instance, in the third chapter of the book of Ephesians and in the third verse, the apostle Paul, who is explaining again this whole idea of salvation by grace in predestination, notice how he links mystery and the word revelation, "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery as I wrote before." And He had just written before in the first chapter. Now, here's what the word revelation means. The word *revelation* means, in the original Greek language, *a pulling aside of the curtain*. It comes right out of the there. In other words, you wouldn't know what was on the stage until the revelation, or the curtain was drawn aside.

As soon as it is drawn aside, then you see and then you understand. And that's how the mystery is explained. God reveals and the curtain is drawn aside, and then we say, "I see now. I see what the Scripture teaches. I believe. I see. By this revelation I understand this mystery." That's what your predestination is. It is a mysterious work of God in the sense that you'd never come to it by yourself. You must come to it in the Bible.

And, this mystery is further mystified by the fact that the agent who brings about your salvation is also a mystery, because the Scripture teaches us in this text here that it is done by the Trinity. Left to himself, man would never come to the conclusion that God is three persons in one nature. Never. In fact, it's one of the things that the rest of the world never understands. But that's what the Scripture teaches, beginning in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, that God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the same nature. You meet one, you've met the other. You reject one, you've rejected the other. It's God who saves you by His actions. Each one of them has a particular role to play in the doctrine, in the truth of your salvation or of your predestination.

Let me read it to you. Verse four of our text. This is the role of God the Father. "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Now, that means before God ever in Genesis one created this world, He had chosen a people. Why does He choose a people? God explains that in the third chapter in the book of Genesis, that man is made in His image, therefore man has an ability to choose. Because He's made in the image of God. That man who is able to choose will choose for the devil instead of for God. God sees that. God has warned, given the consequences. Man is cast out of that garden, out of that fellowship with God, a flaming sword in the hand of an angel there at the garden to make sure that man does not come back in. God could've let it go at that. "Alright, I gave you the best opportunity you'll ever have." Instead, out of those all who are cast out, which is all mankind, He decides in His grace and mercy to choose some and call them back by His grace to Himself. That's the choice of the Father.

Then there is the role of the Son. This comes in verse seven. It says, "in Him, in Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." It was our trespasses that cast us out. All you bankers understand what redemption means. To redeem something, redeem a bond at a price. You know how we are redeemed. It is because of the cross of Jesus Christ, whereupon He shed His blood. He gave His life's blood. That's why on the top of the steeple there is a cross. That's the ministry of Jesus Christ, for the sake of our sins. When He was to be born, the angel came to Joseph and said, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins." That's why He came into this earth. The cradle pointed to the cross. That's the ministry of Jesus Christ. He makes an atonement for our sins, and none of us can do that.

The third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit. In Galatians, the fourth chapter, it

says, "In the fullness of time the Father sent forth the Son." And in the next verse it says, "the Holy Spirit takes the efforts of Christ on the cross and He applies them to our hearts." That's the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Let me read it to you here in our text. This takes place in the thirteenth verse. It says, "in Him, in Christ you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed within with the Holy Spirit of promise." It is the Holy Spirit who takes the work of Jesus Christ, that is explained in the Bible, and calls it the gospel. At some point in time, a mother or some Sunday School teacher or somebody on television or some preacher explains this and suddenly it makes sense, "I see now." That is the work of the Holy Spirit that causes you to see. And this is a marvelous mystery of our salvation forged out in its wonderful plan from before the foundation of the world, right now to the year 2001. It's still at work. Isn't that a marvelous, marvelous. . .that is called predestination. That's how it is effected.

Now, I'm going to have to take a parentheses. Because there are some beloved friends that we have who are Christians who say, "You know, I believe those facts, but I've got a different interpretation. And the interpretation goes like this. God from before the foundation chose some because God, who could foresee down the corridors of history, knew who was going to believe. And He saves those who are going to believe through Jesus Christ." It goes like this.

I read this sermon. "I'm a man who believes like this," he said. "God chooses for you. The devil chooses against you. The casting vote is yours. How you chose makes your salvation." Yes or no? Sounds kind of good, huh! Here's the problem. Man does not have the capacity. The difficulty is not in God. The difficulty is in man and the choosing capacity of man. Is he able, in and of his own intellect and emotions and will, to choose for God? No. I want to tell you, man, in and of himself, he doesn't understand. How many men in this congregation have once said, "I don't know. Now I understand!" Man in and of himself, he doesn't understand. In fact, He objects to what the Bible teaches. He objects to it. And emotionally he does not love the things of God and the Ten Commandments. He thinks they are ineffective. Ted Turner says, "I think they should be call Ten Suggestions." Man doesn't love God, he doesn't understand Him, he's not in love with Him, and he's not about to obey.

It's as though God anticipated this answer that says, "Man can chose all by himself." Listen to the second chapter of Ephesians in which it says that man is dead and he does not act by his will for God. He acts against God. Let me read it to you. Verse one of chapter two. "You," he's still talking to the same people, "you were dead"--past tense--"you were dead in your trespasses in sins in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we, too, all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God," and then it says, "God intervened." Not because we did

something, but in spite of our actions.

Now, here's what this means. Over the history of Christianity, two great giants have written on this subject with powerful force, on this choosing power of man. Luther, the great German reformer, and his book is entitled *Bondage of the Will*. In other words, you can choose, but there's a certain kind of a bondage. You don't choose for God. Oh, you can choose what you're going to eat for breakfast. You can even choose who you're going to marry. But you don't choose for God by yourself. The other great giant is probably the most intellectual man who has walked in America to this day. His name is Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards wrote a treatise on the will, and in it here's what he said. He says, "You act according to your nature." It just is automatic. Your nature. That's what brings you here on this day. Something in you, in your nature brought you here. You made a decision about coming here. You do that for your breakfast and everything else. What you like and what you have in your nature, that's what you choose for. He uses an illustration, which I'm going to modify as my illustration. If this congregation or if someone in this congregation were to say, "I offer you, Jim Baird, a violin that is worth a thousand dollars as a gift or a new set of Callaway golf clubs, also worth a thousand dollars." Now, you choose. You are free to choose, Baird. Choose, choose. Anybody who knows me and knows my nature knows I'm not going to choose that violin. I may not be good at it, but I like that game of golf. That's my nature. That's how I choose everything. I just go by nature.

When the Holy Spirit touches you, the Father who has chosen you has sent the Son, and the Bible says the Son sends the Holy Spirit, and everything of Christ comes alive. And you choose because you now have been regenerated and faith comes. It's irresistible.

A man asked me a good question after the first session here. He said, "Are there people who want to come to Christ, but who are not elect?" My answer was, emphatically and quickly, "No. No!" Nobody wants to come to Christ. They're out there. They don't want to come. They don't understand. They don't care. It's their nature, and they're walking according to that. But if somebody wants to come, it's because the Holy Spirit has touched him. The men out there who do not wish to come to Christ, they walk over a thousand obstacles opportunities for salvation that God puts in their path, so they can get to hell. It may be your mama, who loved you, pleaded with you, or a neighbor. But they insist in unbelief. It's their nature. But when the Holy Spirit touches the sinner, he comes alive. You may do it at early age. You may pray to God. Or you may do it when you're 27. You come alive and you see and you understand. That's how predestination is effected--by the mystery of the Trinity--God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, God the Son--drawing you to Himself.

Now some men say, "You know the trouble with you preachers?" Whenever I hear that I always say, "No, tell me. I think I want to hear it." "The trouble with you

preachers, you always try to argue about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Who cares. I just want to be a Christian and I want to have the Christian life and I want to have the things of God in my life. Who cares about predestination. Who cares."

Well, it must have some care or value because God put it first in His letter to the Ephesians. It's the first thing He talks about. It's got to have an implication. And I want to bear testimony to the implication, quickly, in four things. And there are many, many things in my life. God brings the mind alive to understand what has happened when He chose us before the foundation of the world. He also comes into our heart, and His Spirit is in us, and it makes an effect upon our mind when the mind and the Holy Spirit are working together.

What difference does predestination make? I was with a young couple who were on their way to a Muslim country as missionaries. Just recently married. On their way. They'd been in our congregation in another state. You know what I was saying to them. I was saying, "Look, the country you're going to is tough. But I want to tell you something. God has His predestined people out there. You don't have to be smarter. You don't have to be so hot. You don't have to be so strong. You don't have to be so brilliant. All you have to do is present to them the gospel and God will use the secondary means of your presenting the truth of the gospel, and He is the one who will save His people. Relax. Relax. And go in faith." I know what that means, because when I started my ministry, I didn't come to a seminary like Reformed Theological Seminary. At the Presbyterian seminary I went to, we never spoke about predestination. It wasn't until I was out and in my first weeks preaching that I began this teaching. In fact, the first book I started preaching from was Ephesians. And I got into this predestination immediately. But I want to tell you how I used to evangelize. I used to go out to evangelize, and it was, "Come on, buddy. I'm just as smart as you are, or maybe smarter, and I'm going to show you, and I'm going to convince you." And I would argue. Sometimes people would come to Christ and sometimes--I was with this guy and after two hours in His living room, He stood up and said, "Preacher, I want to tell you something. I played left defensive for Southern Mississippi University. And in my senior year I was the heavyweight Golden Gloves boxing champion of the State of Mississippi. Now, you better get out of here!" Now, we had come to that. And that's one time discretion took over and I left, but even as I left I was saying, "Way to go, Baird. You had that guy. You got Him going. He's so riled up. ...!"

And then I read a book by J.I. Packer on *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, and I went down to the Pensacola Theological Institute and there was a little Frenchman down there, Roger Nicole, and he was preaching about these things--the Five Points of Calvinism--and I'm hearing these things for the first time! And I found out that I'm just God's secondary instrument. Secondary means, just present. It changed my preaching. Man, I used to be mean. You think I'm mean now you should've heard me when I first began. I tell you, I had the congregation in tears ready to stomp me. All you've got to do, my friend, is be

available. The greatest minister, missionaries and evangelists that I know are so low key and so easy for the gospel that it just shames me. And people are coming to Christ all the time. That's because they believe this. They believe it. That's one difference it makes--converts.

Compassion. We are in a relationship world that is in utter conflict everywhere you turn. I can love anybody who loves me, really loves me. I like people. It's easy. It's those other people that I don't like, and I have a critical nature. There are people on the other side of the world that I don't know, and you know that Romans chapter five says that "God chose me and sent His Son Christ for me when I was His enemy, and when I was worthless to Him." That's when He chose me. The compassion that God had for a sinner like me is alarming.

Now that God lives in my heart, and I tell you, a change has come into my heart about people. And it is continuing to grow and to grow. It is a compassion that I know is not in Baird. It's got to be from God. And it's not only from God, because I understand also, that He chose me when I was nothing. And it makes a difference in how I look at people and deal with people. And my heart for them.

Another one is confidence. My daddy, who was born in Scotland, came to this country at the age of nineteen, and told this story. He remembered a preacher on his way to church on Sunday, had his little ten-year-old boy with him. And the daddy said, "You'd better give me your hand. It's icy." And the little boy said, "I can do it." Independent. The little boy slips and falls. The Daddy said, "I'll take your hand." They go a little bit further. He slips, loses his grip. Daddy reaches down and grabs him. They walk a little further, loses his footing again, and daddy just holds him until he regains his equilibrium, and he puts him down and he keeps him."

The Lord Jesus says in chapter ten of the gospel of John, He says, "Baird, I have you in My hand, and no one shall take you out of My hand. No one. Not you. Not anybody." I don't know what faces me, but my nature is to face some tough things in fear, except God has me. Are you afraid? You'll never do any great things out of fear. Nothing. It's out of faith. It's because God has you. Face it. Face it. He's never going to let you go.

And the last one is commitment. He chose me for a purpose, set me aside like a Nazarite. From before the foundation of the world. He's got a purpose for my life. You don't have to be a preacher. He's got a purpose for every Christian's life, whatever it is. He not only has that purpose, He says, "I'm going to deliver you at the end, blameless, forgiven, and also Holy." Holy means set aside for His purpose. I'm committed to Him because He chose me. I'm committed to Him. Doesn't that make sense? That's why we serve Him. That's why we serve Him.

I close with this. Are you of the elect? Ask the question. Are you predestinated? You say, "I don't know. I don't know." Is anybody here saying, "I don't know, I



sure would like to be.” In that situation, I say to them, “If you come to Jesus He will receive you.” For He said in John 6:37, “He that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” Just as I am. Forgive me. I want to follow You.

And I say to you right here today, come to Christ right now. When you do, I then take you to the first part of that verse. And I want to tell you something. I want to tell you why you came to Christ. The first part of that verse says, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me.” There it is. We come to Him, we come to Christ because the Father predestinated us. And I can't help it, and I come just as I am. As we pray together.

*O, God, our heavenly Father, we are amazed at the glory of Thy plan of salvation. It just overwhelms us. And we are overwhelmed that Your love for us, Your forgiveness, we come to Christ. We thank You for receiving us. Great, true, loving God, we thank You. And we ask You to hear our prayers of thanks and commitment. Through our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose holy name we pray, Amen.*

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