



Doctrine, Passions, and Practices **What did God do in Saving us?**

Introduction

1. If you were going to list how God has blessed you, what would you include? Notice what Paul starts with in Ephesians 1 —

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:3-6** 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. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption 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.

2. Here Paul celebrates the blessings of election (“he chose us”) and predestination. But too often we neglect these (and the blessings of God’s foreknowing us, calling us, regenerating us, and preserving us) because these topics are hard to understand, or because godly people have different opinions about them.
3. These are not easy topics. There’s mystery involved and questions we can’t answer. But since the Holy Spirit put these in the Bible, he wants us to study them, seek to understand them, and benefit from them. That’s what I want to help us do this morning. Part of my goal is to stir you to study Scripture for yourself; that’s more important than agreeing with me. No one needs to agree with me on this topic to be a member of Mercy Hill.
4. But I want to teach these doctrines because God can use them to change our lives. That’s what George Mueller experienced. He is known for starting orphanages all over England. Here’s what happened when he was 24 years old:

“Before this period I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election ... and final persevering grace. But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the Word of God ... I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths.

“To my great astonishment, I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines.

“As to the effect which these doctrines had on me, I am constrained to state for God’s glory, that though I am still exceedingly weak, and by no means so dead to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life, as I might be, and as I ought to be, yet by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before.” (from George Mueller’s Autobiography, cited in Piper, Pleasures of God, p.124).

Doctrine

1. Because of our sinfulness, before we were saved we didn't want to believe in Jesus. We preferred money and sex and entertainment more than Jesus and His glory.

^{ESV} **Mark 10:23-27** And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."



2. Therefore, if God left us to what we wanted to choose, none of us would ever be saved. But God did not leave us to what we would choose. God took merciful, loving action to save us, as Paul describes in Romans 8:28-30 –

^{ESV} **Romans 8:28-30** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

"Foreknew"

This can't mean that God foreknew those who would have faith, because left to ourselves none of us would choose to have faith; if we are going to have faith, God must give it to us.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Other passages showing that we cannot be saved unless faith and repentance are given to us by God: Matt 16:17; Joh 6:44,65; Acts 5:31; 11:18; Rom 8:7; 9:16; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:24-26.)

This word "foreknow" refers to God's "covenantal love in which he sets his affection on those whom he has chosen" (Schreiner, Romans, 452).

"Foreknow" is a synonym for "choosing," and is another way of describing "election." God chose to save a vast multitude that no one can count from every nation, tongue, and tribe. It's not that everyone wanted to be saved, but God only chose a few. It's that God invited everyone to be saved, everyone ran the other way, and God pursued and saved a vast multitude that no one can count. Without election no one would be saved.

This shows us how passionate and personal God's love is. God did not just give potential salvation to the world, and then sit back to see who responded. If you are trusting Jesus, then before the foundation of the world God saw you in your sinfulness, saw that you were unwilling to trust Jesus, and at the cost of crushing His own Son set His love and affection personally on you, and chose to save you.

The only reason God could do this was because before the foundation of the world, in great love, He had planned to punish all your sins in Christ. God chose us "in Him" (Christ) before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

This is what it means to be one of God's "elect." This is a term used throughout the Bible to describe those whom God has graciously and mercifully chosen to save: Matt 24:22, 24,31; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; 11:7; 2Tim 2:10; I Peter 1:1.



"Predestined"

This term "stresses the preordained plan of God that will certainly come to pass" (Schreiner, Romans, 453). If you are trusting Jesus, then God has predestined you to be conformed to the image of Jesus and enjoy His glory forever (Rom 8:29).

Paul emphasizes that God predestines us "in love." This shows that we will not fully understand God's love for us unless we understand predestination:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:4-6** In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

So before you had faith, while you were still a sinner, while you were no different from anyone else, God set His love on you and predestined you for salvation.

^{ESV} **Acts 13:48** And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

This is a breathtaking picture of God's love. I was a sinner. Left to myself that's all I would ever be. But God, in astonishing love and mercy, chose me, a sinner, and predestined me, a sinner, to salvation. God could do this only "through Christ," through the Cross (Eph 1:5-6).

"Called"

The word "call" has two different meanings in Scripture. Sometimes it refers to the call given to everyone – urging everyone to repent, trust Jesus, and be saved.

^{ESV} **Matthew 22:14** For many are called, but few are chosen."

But that can't be what Paul means in Rom 8:30, because in v.30 it's only those who are predestined who are called, and all those who are called are justified (saved). Which means that all who are called trust Jesus. So this is a different meaning of "called."

Paul uses the word "called" "as God's effective summons by which people are brought into relationship with himself" (Moo, Romans, 530). When God calls people (in this sense of the word) He causes them to obey the call. This is like Jesus' call to Lazarus: "Come forth." Jesus' call didn't just invite Lazarus; it raised Lazarus. So when Jesus called you He changed your heart, gave you faith, and brought you to Himself.



So when Paul talks about "the called" he's talking about believers:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:23-24** ... but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This calling accomplishes conversion. Through this call God supernaturally changes our wills so we repent and trust Jesus. This is also called "regeneration"; being "born again."

^{ESV} **John 6:44,65** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day ... This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

^{ESV} **Mark 10:26** And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 36:26-27** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

^{ESV} **Acts 11:18** When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:1-10** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ...⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

(See also Heb 8:8-13; Phil 1:29; Acts 5:31.)

How can you know you have been called? It's because you have a new heart which trusts and loves Jesus; not perfectly, but persistently. If you are not sure, then turn to Jesus and trust Him now. Repent of your sin. Look at His mercy and goodness as expressed on the Cross, and trust Him. When you do this, you will have experienced His saving power changing your heart, and you will know that in free, sovereign, grace He chose to love and save you from eternity past.

"Justified"

We covered this last week. When we trust Jesus as Savior, Lord, and all-satisfying Treasure, God credits all our sin to Jesus, and punishes Jesus for our sin, and God credits all Jesus' perfect righteousness to us, and loves and cares for us because of Jesus.

"Glorified"

Every single person whom God foreknew, predestined, called, and justified will end up glorified. God will keep all of His elect persevering until the end. None will be lost.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 32:40** I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing them good...

^{ESV} **Jude 1:24** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.



Passions and Practices

1. Let this increase your humility before God, as you see that you contributed absolutely nothing to your salvation – that even your faith was a gift given to you by God through Jesus' death on the Cross. John Newton said: "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great Saviour."
2. Let this increase your worship of God, as you see God's love for you: when you were still His enemy, at great cost to Himself, He set his love and affection on you, and chose to save you, not for any good in you, but because of Jesus' death on the Cross for you.
3. Let this increase your boldness in evangelism, as you see that God can save anyone through your love and words.
4. Let this increase your confidence about your future, as you see that the good work God has begun in you, He will continue until the day of Christ Jesus: God will keep you trusting Jesus until heaven, strengthening you, protecting you, comforting you all the way to glory.

^{ESV} **Philippians 1:6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

For further discussion

1. Before Sunday's teaching, did you think mostly about what we do to get saved — or about what God does in saving us? How did Sunday's teaching affect you?
2. Do you think it's good that many Christians don't think about election and predestination and calling and regeneration? Why or why not?
3. What are some reasons you have a hard time believing in election and predestination as Pastor Steve explained them on Sunday? Did any of that change as a result of Sunday?
4. Read Mark 10:23-27 again. Do you have any friends about whom you've said: "They could never be saved." Did Sunday's teaching change your opinion of what could happen?
5. Read Philippians 1:6 again. What difference would it make if you had started the good work in you, and you needed to continue it to the end? How does it comfort you to know that God started the good work in you, and that He will continue it to the end?
6. Read Ephesians 1:3-5 again. Think about the fact that God's predestining you was "in love." What facets of His love does this show you?

For further reading

Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Chapters 32-35.

Murray, John. Redemption Accomplished and Applied.

Peterson, Robert A. Election and Free Will: God's Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility.

Piper, John. The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God.

Storms, Sam. Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election.