


2 TIMOTHY 1:8-10

A HOLY CALLING

“Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,”¹

od “saved us and called us to a holy calling,” according to the Apostle’s testimony. The statement appears straight forward and rather pedestrian. We are inclined to say, “Of course God saved us; and of course He called us to a holy calling.” However, I fear that it is far too easy for us to pass by the words Paul wrote, assuming that we really understand all that is entailed in God’s call. The Apostle is actually making a significant statement concerning what went on long before the world began and long before mankind was created. In that distant past, God was working, preparing for our salvation before sin had entered the world. Before our first parents fell, before the universe was plunged into ruin, God was at work preparing salvation.

Clearly, what the Apostle wrote is significant for believers. Since the Word of God is inspired by God, and since no portion of the Word of God is superfluous, it should follow that what has been written is worthy of our careful consideration. Therefore, I invite you to join me in exploring what the Apostle wrote concerning “a holy calling.”

GOD SAVED US — I intend to focus on the eighth verse in a future message. In this message today, I wish to jump ahead, focusing on the ninth verse. It is not that suffering is insignificant or that we should run from suffering; rather, when suffering we need to maintain focus on who we are and on what God has done for us. Therefore, though the order for considering these two verses is reversed in my presentation, there is a rationale behind my decision.

Christians who are called to suffer will be sustained by the power of God. The God who sustains us in our suffering is the same God who saved us. In light of this knowledge, let’s focus on God and on the salvation He provides. We who are Christians know there is a God. Moreover, we know that God delights to receive all who come to Him in the manner He expects. This essential truth is not necessarily popular nor is it well-received in contemporary society. In popular thought, good people go to Heaven—they deserve to go to Heaven. Of course, because they are good, and because “good” is defined by our standard, almost everyone goes to Heaven. Only those whom *we* have decided are unworthy of Heaven will be excluded.

Our standard sets a rather low bar for going to Heaven. Apparently this is adopted to ensure that no one’s feelings will be hurt—we are very sensitive about injuring delicate feelings. Tragically, this attitude has become regnant in contemporary society, even insinuating itself into the life of the churches. However, the promise of salvation is exclusive. The Master has warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” [**MATTHEW 7:21**]. Surely you will agree that this is quite a stern warning against presumption. Here, then, is a precept to hold in mind: ***Good people do not go to Heaven; redeemed people go to Heaven.***

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Jesus continued by delivering a strong warning against presuming against the Holy One, “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” [MATTHEW 7:22, 23]. Surely an impartial reading of the words recorded will lead readers to understand that Jesus does not anticipate that “good people” go to Heaven. In fact, He states rather emphatically there will be quite a number of individuals claiming to have performed great signs and miracles in His Name who will be excluded from Heaven!

Immediately before He spoke of the exclusion of many from the precincts of Heaven, Jesus had warned those listening, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” [MATTHEW 7:13, 14].

Consider a few other instances when Jesus made statements concerning the exclusivity of those who were acceptable in the sight of God. One statement that is immediately recognised by almost all Christians is that in which Jesus testified, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” [JOHN 14:6]. The gate is narrow and the way is hard; and Jesus is the way! One major reason the way is hard is that those who wish to come to God must come through Jesus. There is no other approach to God. Goodness will never suffice. In fact, as Isaiah has said, “Our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” [ISAIAH 64:6]. If an individual is trying to come to God through the church, through sacraments or ordinances, through prayer or personal piety or even through attempting to perform specific good deeds, they will be disappointed! Jesus bluntly said, “No one comes to the Father except through me!”

For the sake of any outside of Christ I emphasise the exclusivity required to come to God by appealing to another instance of Jesus’ teaching. Recall that Jesus also taught us, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” [JOHN 6:37-39].

Soon after He had spoken those stunning words, Jesus again stressed the exclusive nature of salvation by stating emphatically, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” [JOHN 6:44]. If the Father does not draw an individual, she or he cannot—**cannot**—come to Jesus. Exclusive? Absolutely!

Recall the divinely provided commentary of Jesus’ testimony to an inquisitive Pharisee. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God” [JOHN 3:18-21]. According to Jesus’ own testimony, the world is divided into “saints” and “ain’ts.” There is no possibility of claiming kinship to the Holy One except through faith in the Son of God, and such faith is impossible if God does not draw the individual to believe.

The disciples learned this lesson quite well. Haled before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John testified, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” [ACTS 4:12].

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Paul has written of this Jesus, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5, 6a].

Similarly, John the Apostle has written, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” [1 JOHN 5:12].

Thus, while the need for salvation is universal because “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23], and though “[Christ] died for all” [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:14, 15], salvation is given only to those who believe [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:10]. All mankind does not go to Heaven; only those who are born from above through faith in the Son of God are welcomed into God’s Heaven. The Christian, the one who is born from above, the one who has rested in Christ the Lord, the one who is redeemed from sin and who has received the forgiveness of sin, the child of God has the promise of God that she or he shall be received into the glory of God.

In our text, Paul is not saying that he is saved and that Timothy is saved to the exclusion of all others; the Apostle is embracing the truth that all who have faith in the Son of God are saved by God. “Salvation belongs to the Lord” [PSALM 3:7]. The Apostle is referring to the call to faith in God, the call that each believer has received. Note as well that the salvation in view is in the past tense (aorist tense in the Greek); this is something that has already taken place. In other words, Paul sees salvation as secured in Christ Jesus at the cross and applied to each one who believes. The Lord has provided an infinite salvation in that His sacrifice was infinite—it could not be otherwise since He is God, that that sacrifice was accomplished in His death.

This is the promise of the Word. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” [1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18].

It is a glorious promise for the redeemed people of God. There is great encouragement in the Apostle’s words concerning that day. “I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’

‘O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?’

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58].

GOD CALLED US — The Apostle also says that God has “called us.” It is possible that Paul was speaking of his and of Timothy’s calling to service as “a preacher and an Apostle and a teacher” [2 TIMOTHY 1:11]. Unquestionably, God does call some to serve in such roles. You have heard me say on multiple occasions that churches are not to hire preachers; they are to permit God to appoint whom He wills. Woe to that congregation that becomes so desperate that they hire someone to preach. Blessed is that assembly who receives the one God has appointed. Though it is possible that Paul is referring to God’s appointment, I don’t believe that is correct.

Since Paul includes Timothy in this divine call, and since by extension all who read the missive would understand that the Apostle includes them in this divine call, it seems best to understand that he is referring to the call to faith that God has issued to every believer. This is consistent with the Apostle’s reference in his earlier letter to Timothy. Paul encouraged the younger preacher, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” [1 TIMOTHY 6:12]. Focus on the admonition to “Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.” Here, Paul presents the identical concept that is under consideration in today’s text.

The matter presented raises a contentious issue—*election* or *divine sovereignty*. The thought that God chooses has disturbed Christians since earliest days. However, inveighing against God’s sovereignty will not change reality—God does as He wills. We may observe His actions and we may know what He does after He has acted, but we are not able to compel God to do our will. Many Christians rebel against the idea that God elects whom He wills to salvation. They want to argue that the concept is “unfair.” Paul has answered this objection elsewhere, and it behooves us to consider what he wrote. The passage is somewhat extended, but I am certain it will prove beneficial to consider what the Apostle has written. “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: ‘About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.’ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’

“What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles” [ROMANS 9:6-24]?

Those who complain that God is not fair are demanding in essence that God appear before mankind to give an accounting. Of course, things don't work that way—we give an accounting to the Creator rather than Him giving an accounting to us. Paul is not precisely addressing the issue raised in our text, but he does address the matter in tangential fashion. When someone hears the teaching of God's sovereign choice, he may complain that if God chooses some to salvation, then it must follow that He chooses others to be condemned. However, careful reading of the Scriptures does not permit us to assign such an action to God.

God elects no one to be damned; people reject the offer of grace in Christ, condemning themselves. Underscore the thought that God does not—indeed, **God cannot**—induce sin or unbelief. As the Lord's brother emphatically states, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" [JAMES 1:13]. God, the Holy One, is not responsible in the slightest degree for the sinful nature people exhibit. An individual may pretend to be a Christian; but only one born from above *is* a Christian. All other people are still in their sin and under sentence of death. Those who respond in arrogance or anger at this knowledge reveal that they neither know God nor seek His honour. But those who respond with humility before the wisdom of God reveal the work of the Spirit of God in their lives, demonstrating that they have received God's grace in Christ the Lord.

In fact, it is only after the fact that an individual is able to recognise that she or he is elect. Before we are born from above, we cannot know whether God has called us. It is as though we stand before the cross and see a door. Over the door is inscribed the words, "Whosoever will." Passing through that door to the other side of the cross we are able to look back and see written above the door the inscription, "Chosen in Christ Before the Foundation of the World." This is the reason I preach as I do. I do not know who is chosen in Christ. Therefore, I present the promise of God, pleading with those who hear to receive the gift of life in Christ the Lord. Whenever I preach, however, I have confidence that some who are elect will hear and they will respond to the message of life. Therefore, I urge those who hear to believe this message. I exalt the grace of God, imploring and begging those who hear to receive the gift of life.

Thus, the redeemed are identified in the Word as "God's chosen ones" [COLOSSIANS 3:12], "elect exiles" [1 PETER 1:1] and "a chosen race" [1 PETER 2:9]. Writing the Thessalonians, Paul testifies of them, "We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" [1 THESSALONIANS 1:4-10].

The Thessalonian saints were recognised as elect saints because they were convicted by the Word that was preached and thus they responded to the call to believe the message that was presented. The work of the Spirit became evident as they imitated the apostolic lifestyle, stood firm and evinced joy in the face of persecution, trumpeting the message of life. They invested themselves in spreading the Word of God throughout their own province and penetrated neighbouring provinces with the Gospel of Christ the Lord. Having believed and having begun to serve, now they lived in anticipation of the return of the Master, Jesus.

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In the Ephesian encyclical, the Apostle opens with a strong statement concerning God's electing grace and the privileged position in Christ enjoyed by those who are redeemed. "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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 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. 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 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" [EPHESIANS 1:3-10].

Note what Paul says concerning the blessing believers now have in Christ Jesus the Lord. The redeemed were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The purpose of God's choosing was not that we would be delivered from judgement, though we are delivered from judgement; the purpose of His choosing was to ensure that we who are chosen "should be holy and blameless before Him." God predestined those whom He has chosen for adoption as sons "to the praise of His glorious grace." Now, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." All this was by the predeterminate will of God.

It was not so much that we were looking for God; rather, it is that God chose us and called us before we were even born. Before the world was formed, before time began, God chose whom He would to be redeemed in order that He might be glorified. Hold onto this truth—we cannot know we are chosen until responding to His call! When He calls we will respond. There is nothing to glorify any mere mortal, for the choosing was God's and not ours.

For the sake of completeness, I do want to complete what Paul wrote in these opening words of this Ephesian encyclical. "In him," that is, in Christ the Lord, "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" [referring to God], "so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him," that is, in Christ Jesus, "you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" [EPHESIANS 1:11-14].

Already, we have an inheritance in Christ. We who are saved are not left as orphans. Recall Jesus' promise: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" [JOHN 14:18]. And He has fulfilled His promise! It was always the Father's purpose to work according to His will; and the redeemed were always central to His purpose. God was at work in the lives of those who would be saved even before they heard the Gospel. Just as those earlier saints believed and were adopted into His Family, so we who believe in this day are brought into His Family. More than that, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, "who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it." Think of That! The Spirit of God serves as the guarantee of our inheritance; He is the down payment of all that God has promised for those who are saved.

This is the privileged position now occupied by the believer. Called by God, chosen by Him before the foundation of the world, sealed with the Holy Spirit—now, we who believe are comforted in the knowledge that He is the promissory note of our inheritance. In light of this, we now have a fuller understanding of John's testimony concerning our position as believers. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" [1 JOHN 3:2].

A HOLY CALLING — Together with the Apostle, each believer is able to testify that God “saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” [2 TIMOTHY 1:9]. Indeed, the salvation and calling which we have received is not “because of our works.” No one is saved because he or she presents some particular deeds before the Lord God. No deed, no series of deeds, can ever suffice to assuage the wrath of God. However, the cross of Christ provided the refuge to turn aside the wrath we so richly deserve. Likewise, no individual can claim to be called through His own desire. John testifies, “To all who did receive [the Son of God], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” [JOHN 1:12, 13].

Considering the dative adjective translated “holy” in the phrase “holy calling” raises the question of whether Paul means us to understand that God’s calling is holy, or whether he means for us to understand that because we are called by God we are called to be holy.² Both understandings are true and both are likely meant. A holy God issues a holy call for believers to live a holy life.³ This is the testimony of **EPHESIANS 2:10**. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

This holy calling, this effectual calling to life in the Beloved Son, is not because we laboured to secure it. We have just passed through the Easter Season. Each Holy Week, I grieve at news reports of people who are crucified in and attempt to emulate the Saviour. Few last more than a matter of minutes before begging to be lowered from the cross. Others flagellate themselves in order, drawing blood and experiencing intense pain. Inevitably, when these individuals are interviewed they speak of making atonement for their sinful condition. If the flagellation and the crucifixion were sufficient, they would not need to repeat the agony. However, the fact that people subject themselves to this pain each year is mute, though effective, testimony to the fact that their personal pain is futile in turning aside the wrath of God.

It is vital to note that walking the Via Dolorosa, reciting the Stations of the Cross, climbing the Scala Sancta on one’s knees, denying oneself comforts for Lent are all incapable of making the sinner acceptable before God. Reciting prayers and reading holy books cannot compel God to receive the sinner. We are taught by the Apostle, “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time” [1 TIMOTHY 2:5, 6]. I say this so that the people of God will look to Him who died because of our sin and who was raised for our justification. I say this for the benefit of any who imagine that religious devotion will in some manner induce God to accept the sinner. I say this so that no one will be deceived by religion, stumbling into eternity without God and without hope.

The issue is so important that I am compelled to emphasise this truth through appeal to several clear statements provided in the Word of God. Writing the Galatian Christians, who were even then departing the path of grace marked out for them, the Apostle Paul warned, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” [GALATIANS 2:16].

² The question is whether this is to be understood as a dative of means, or as a dative of instrument.

³ William D. Mounce, **Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 46** (Word, Inc., Dallas, TX 2000) 482-3; George W. Knight, **The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1992) 374

Anyone who has participated in a Baptist service more than a few times will have heard **EPHESIANS 2:8, 9**: “By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” I emphasise the cautionary statement Paul issued, “This is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Salvation is a gift, not a debt; it is given freely and not as an exchange.

Note, as well, the Apostle’s statement to Titus. “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” [**TITUS 3:4-7**].

Negatively, God saved us and called us and His salvation and His calling excludes our own efforts. Let me stress this truth for the benefit of those who are now blinded by religion: salvation is not found in a church; salvation is not found in rites or rituals; salvation is not found in reciting the sinner’s prayer; salvation is not found in any human effort. Salvation is offered only on the basis of grace through Christ Jesus as Master over life.

Paul used a strong contrast to capture attention of those reading and to contrast the negative statement just made. Unfortunately, what he wrote is not immediately apparent in many English translations. Having stated the negative, destroying any possibility that we can somehow recommend ourselves to God, the Apostle quickly states the positive truth—we are saved and called because of God’s own purpose and grace, given before the ages began. Let’s focus during these remaining moments on what God has done and why He has done it.

For His own purpose, God has saved and called those whom He wills. To describe what God has done, Paul used a word that speaks of premeditation.⁴ In short, God planned our salvation and our calling before the world was formed. We have already witnessed the statements presenting this truth in other passages; and we will witness it again at the end of this verse. Paul speaks of this divine purpose elsewhere in Scripture. Consider a few instances. “In [Christ] we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will” [**EPHESIANS 1:11**]. Predestined according to God’s purpose or predetermined plan, we are assured an inheritance in Christ Jesus. God’s rich provision for those whom He redeems is not an afterthought—it was the divine plan from long before the universe began.

Later, in this same Ephesian Letter, the Apostle has written, “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him” [**EPHESIANS 3:7-12**]. According to God’s predetermined plan, God’s wisdom is revealed through the salvation of those whom He has chosen. The message Paul carried was the revelation of all that God had planned and now provides for those who receive His gift of life.

⁴ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1964–) 155–157; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 357; John A. Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 318

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Here is yet another instance of God working out His plan in the lives of individuals. “When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls” [ROMANS 9:10, 11]. Paul uses this incident in the life of Rebekah and Isaac to illustrate that God is intimately involved in directing the affairs of those whom He has chosen.

God’s purpose is coupled with His grace. The Apostle addresses grace repeatedly in his letters, basing almost every other kindness on God’s grace. In this missive, grace is intertwined with mercy [see 2 TIMOTHY 1:16, 18], with understanding [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:7] and with repentance [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:25]. God’s purpose and grace, coupled with mercy, understanding and repentance is extended to those whom God has chosen “in Christ Jesus.” This particular phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” lies at the heart of Paul’s theology since he uses the term on at least forty-nine occasions in his letters. And he uses the same idea through use of other similar phrases such as “in Christ” and “in the beloved.”⁵ Clearly, all that we may claim is because we are in Christ.

In the closing moments of this study, note that Paul focuses on the timing of what God has done for the redeemed. God determined all that He would do for us “before the ages began.” Consequently, this is the same phrase that is used in TITUS 1:1-3: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.” Eternal life was promised “before the ages began.” God determined what He would do for us “before the ages began.”

Before time, Christ was ready to present His life as a sacrifice for sinful man. Before time began, God made provision for fallen people. Prior to creating the world, God was. Before ever a man was created, God prepared salvation and called those whom He would redeem. Out of eternity, before we were and before anything else was, God in His grace determined to save us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

I have already made reference to the passages in Ephesians that I want you to note again. “[God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” [EPHESIANS 1:4].

With the Apostle, we can attest that we are charged to preach “the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God ... so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” [cf. EPHESIANS 3:8-11].

John the Revelator warns that those who will worship the beast during the days of the Great Tribulation are those “Whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” [REVELATION 13:8]. Those whose names have been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life will not worship the beast, and they will be saved. This is the identical testimony provided in REVELATION 17:8.

I confess that I cannot fathom what God has revealed. There is no foundation for the thought that He chose us based on who we are—we were not yet created when He determined that He would save us. He did not choose us because of what we had done, for we did not even exist when He provided a sacrifice for us. It is not as though we deserved grace—otherwise it wouldn’t be grace. God provided a sacrifice for us and we are utterly undeserving of that grace.

⁵ A total of thirty-three times

2 TIMOTHY 1:8
A HOLY CALLING

There is but one response to such love—worship Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Those who listen and who have never come in faith to this marvellous Saviour are now invited to come to Him. I cannot say if you are saved or lost; I can say that if you have faith in the Son of God, your sins are forgiven and you have a place in Him. Before time was created, before man was made, before sin had ever entered into God's universe, the Father determined to provide a sacrifice for man. Before He created man, He knew that the mortal would plunge the race into ruin. Nevertheless, God created man to know Him and to enjoy Him forever. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, was presented as a perfect and infinite sacrifice for mankind before the world began. We cannot fathom such love; but we can experience it.

Jesus the Son of God gave His life as a sacrifice because of our sin. Having given His life as a sacrifice, He was buried—certified as dead and placed in the tomb. However, the Good News we declare is that Jesus didn't stay dead. God raised Him to life. He broke the bonds of death, came out of the tomb and was seen by those who knew Him. He ascended into glory where He is seated at the right hand of God. Now, this same Jesus invites all who are appointed to life to come in faith. The Word calls, "If you agree with God that Jesus is Master over your life, believing with all your being that God raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with God, and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set at liberty." When Paul wrote those words, he concluded by citing the Prophet Joel, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved."⁶

My prayer is that you glorify God by placing faith in this Risen, Reigning Son of God. Amen.

⁶ See **ROMANS 10:9-13**