

Just Because He Loves You

I'm convinced every husband has heard this question from his wife: "Why do you love me?" It's a trap! Because if you answer, "Honey, I love you because you are so intelligent," or "you're so pretty," or "you're so fun to be around," you are implying that if they weren't those things, then you'd stop loving them! I'm convinced that the only good answer to that question is "Just because I love you." This, of course, isn't what they want to hear, and it's often answered with "ugh."

The Ephesian Christians that Paul is writing to had a similar relationship with their gods. Ephesus was a major port city in the Ancient Roman world, and it was home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World: the Temple of Artemis.

In case you aren't brushed up on ancient Greek religious practices, Artemis, or the version of her that was worshiped in Ephesus, was a fertility goddess. In a time when more children meant more workers in your shop or farm, more status, more people to take care of you when you get old, and when you desperately needed rain so that you could have fertile fields to eat, you needed to appease Artemis the fertility goddess. You needed her to be happy, so you give your money, give your crops and livestock, give your daughters to be temple prostitutes used in "fertility worship," all so that you can say to Artemis, "Look at what I've given you! Bless me!"

The Jewish people in Ephesus didn't do such things. They knew their Old Testament, and worshiped the one true God. Kind of. Sure, they worshiped the LORD of the Old Testament, but they had convinced themselves that God had chosen the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, to be his special people because they were morally better than everyone else, especially those dirty Ephesian Greeks! According to them, they had earned God's favor because they were so zealous and faithful to his Law.

These are the two major backgrounds of the Ephesian Christians, who are likely fresh converts into Christianity, and still somewhat affected by their old ways of thinking about God and have this basic concept of their relationship with him: "Why does God love me? Because I serve him well. Because I keep his law. Because I am faithful to him- or at least I try to be."

And Paul's major point of this section blows that out of the water: Why does God save you? Why does God choose you? Why does God sacrifice his son for you? Why does God love you?

Just because he loves you.

Let's walk through the text.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Paul's already up to something! Here he's telling you exactly who Jesus is. God the Father is the Father, and the God of Jesus Christ. How can that be? Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. He is eternal, completely equal with God the Father, equal in power, glory, and status eternally begotten of the Father like we say in the Nicene Creed. We know that Jesus is true God as the Father is. At the same time, he is a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, and, like us, calls God the Father his "God"

because he lowered himself to become a human like us. Paul is showing you the two natures of Christ, that is, who he is: One with God, one with us.

who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Why does Paul need us to know that? Because it is through Christ that God the Father gives us every good and beautiful spiritual blessing, not necessarily money or honor or, but something more. Something that makes you rich regardless of what's in your bank account. So what is it?

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he[b] predestined us for adoption to sonship[c] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—

Before time existed. Before the laws of nature were created. Before God even said, "let there be," he knew you. He knew your name. And he loved you. He cherished you. He delighted in you and said, "You are mine."

And so he predestined you- he guided all the events of history, he formed and shaped every everything that has ever occurred during the existence of this world, to *adoption to sonship*. What is that, exactly? In greek, that's just one word "υιοθεσίαν," which is rare in the Bible, but was extremely common in the Ancient world. This word is a legal term- when the master of a house needed a male heir to give all of his possessions when he died, but didn't have a son, he would formally adopt a relative or a servant and officially and legally declare him his son, and therefore the heir to everything he had.

That is what God has done to you. Consider this, when Christ was baptized, what happened? The Father shouted from Heaven, THIS is my Son, and with him I am well pleased. And so when you are baptized into Christ, God the Father declares YOU to be his Son, his Daughter, and when he looks at you, he doesn't see your guilt, your sins, your mistakes, your flaws, your evil, he sees Holy and Blameless- the perfection of Christ himself. That is how God chooses to see you. Why?

Look at the phrases: "In love." "In accordance with his pleasure and will..." **Just because he loves you.** Not because you deserve it. Just because he loves you. It's that simple. It's that beautiful.

6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Why is Paul telling you this? Why is he teaching the Doctrine of Election, that God from eternity chose you to be his own? Not to make you question "why some and not others?" Not to make you try to earn his favor, it's already yours. Paul wants you to share his joy and praise God for his glorious grace, his undeserved, unmerited, un-asked for love that he's given to you, **just because he loves you.** And if you didn't hear it the first time, he's given it to us IN the One he loves. He finds you beautiful. He finds you glorious. He finds you lovely- why? Because Christ is glorious and lovely, and you are in Christ. Yes, I know that's redundant- we just said it. But that's what Paul is doing. He doesn't want you to forget it!

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us.

Here's the thing. If it's true that God knew you before the foundation of the world, and he knows you perfectly now, he knows everything about you. He knows how selfish you are. He knows about your laziness. He knows about the gossip. The lust. The anger. The times when you have purposely and gladly hurt people. And God is completely good, and he is completely just. He can't just forget it and pretend it doesn't exist! If he did that, he wouldn't really be good. He'd be evil. Injustice and sin demands punishment. You know the hymn verse, *Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies! Your and my evil demands death. But the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.* The acceptance, the adoption into Sonship, the beaming smile of the Father that we enjoy, it had to be earned, but not by us, but by someone so holy that he could be the perfect human being that all of us should have been, and so infinite and big that his death could satisfy the righteous, just wrath of a holy God.

It had to be Christ. And only him, true God and true Man. And in this sacrifice, you see the truest and fullest and most horrible, but most beautiful manifestation of God's grace, just how rich it is. That the Father would slay his own Son, to make his enemies his children.

With all wisdom and understanding, 9 he[d] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

Yet, on the Cross, we see the truest and fullest manifestation of the wisdom of God. That through the greatest injustice, the torture and murder of someone truly good, a holy man being punished for crimes he didn't commit, God did the most marvelous, beautiful thing: he made you his. God made you perfect. God forgave your sins and revealed the mystery of his will, the depths of his heart- He is a God who loves and redeems sinners.

And now, it's done. This was the center of God's entire plan, and it's fulfilled- to bring into unity all things in Heaven and on Earth under Christ.

What exactly does that mean? That phrase, "to bring unity," is a greek rhetorical term. Literally, it means to "sum up," like when you "sum up" or "say in short" your argument at the end of a speech. To "bring it all together." And in Christ, God brings all things together. In Christ, the division between God and his creation is destroyed, the curtain between the Holy of Holies and the rest of the temple was torn in two when Christ died, God and his creation are fully unified and are at one because of the death that Christ died. It's the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve fell into sin- perfect unity and fellowship between God and his people. This is true now, but it will be fully and completely true when Christ comes back to take us home, and we his chosen people from all eternity live with him in the true Garden of Eden forever.

There is a lot we could talk about in this text. Here's one.

Part of studying and preparing for a sermon is reading what other people say about the text, or about the specific doctrine that you'll be teaching- in this case, the doctrine of election or predestination- that God knew and chose and loved you before he ever created the world, and that he had it happen through Jesus's death on the cross and through the Spirit creating faith in your heart when you were baptized- and the Spirit creating faith in your heart through the Word and Sacrament. It's a beautiful, comforting teaching, but it has caused absolute chaos among theologians for a long, long time- especially for Lutherans.

What happens is that some Christians will say, "yes, God chose you. He chose to give you an opportunity to earn his favor." Or, "God chose you. He chose to give you an opportunity to put your faith in him." Or, "God chose you because he saw in the future that you would choose to have faith." That's **NOT** what Paul says! God chose you freely to be his and to give you free salvation because of Jesus' death and chose to give you faith as a free gift. All of it was his choice, not yours!

Why is this so hard to accept? Because the human heart, deep down, wants to answer that essential question, "why does God love me," with, "because me! Because I'm a good church goer, I'm generous, I'm kind to people, I pray a lot, because I have a good faith." And if that's how you think, my question to you is this: what happens when you're not?

The doctrine of election destroys our sinful, pharisee pride- he didn't choose you because of you. But you know what else it does. It liberates us. I can serve God and my neighbor out of joy- because I want to, not because I have to- because every spiritual blessing is already mine. Because he delights in me. Because he sees "perfect" when he looks at me. Because he loves me more than I would ever dare hope. Why?

Just because he loves me.

Amen.