

Ephesians 1:13-14: Chosen, I

Since I am about to deal with such a sensitive topic, let me reveal my own philosophy of teaching. Where I think the Bible teaches something, I teach to persuade. I cannot do differently. I think God's truth deserves that kind of an approach, rather than to just say, "Here are three views, or five views, or seven views." At the same time, I always respect you. And you not only have a right but also an obligation to form your own conclusions before God. That is one reason I present books from different viewpoints. I am going to try, as I go through these three big passages, to present the best arguments from the other side. I have been doing some of that as we have gone through. But obviously I am biased. I am not neutral. I have convictions. They rest on the Calvinist side so bear with me. I can understand that people have trauma of the soul concerning this matter. It is a very delicate and emotional matter. At the end I will talk about why we evangelize if what I think is true. Why do I feel a need to give the Gospel? That is a big concern of many people and it is mine as well. Certainly it is wrong not to evangelize. I will just tell you that much now. But I have to talk about other matters before we can try to pull things together.

Let me deal with a few questions or concerns before we start. One is in regard to the fifth point of the five points of Calvinism, the perseverance of the saints. The first component of that is God's preservation of His saints; people connect that with the popular statement, "once saved always saved." That connection is correct, although I will qualify it by saying I do not use that exact terminology because sometimes it is understood to mean once professed always saved. That is not the case. Furthermore, there is a whole society of people called the Grace Evangelical Society, which teaches that since you are saved by God's grace and cannot fall away it does not matter how you live. You could live a very shabby life and still be a Christian in good standing with the Lord; you would only jeopardize the loss of your rewards in the millennium. I am not making this up. This is Zane Hodges and the Grace Evangelical Society. They are Bible-believing Christians and people I respect, but they have taken what I regard as a true conclusion that God does keep us, and they make assurance of salvation 100% absolutely certain, no matter how you live. The Bible has a number of things to say about assurance. But one of the things it says is that assurance is tied to how we live. I do not believe you can lose your salvation. But you can certainly damage or even lose your assurance.

When the early fathers of the church wrote about the issue at all, they assumed that God foreknows people's choices and chooses on that basis. An extreme person named Pelagius went so far as to deny the sovereignty of God. His teaching set the stage for Augustine to come down strongly on the side of divine sovereignty. As a general outline, the history of the doctrine of predestination represents people's responses to extreme positions on one side or the other. I do not mean to sound like I waver between Calvinism and Arminianism when I talk like that, because I do not. But Augustine was very plainly on the sovereignty side. It would not be fair to say he was on the Calvinist side. That would be anachronistic. Augustine came first. But Luther and Calvin both credited Augustine with teaching them the Gospel, so it is fair to say the Reformation was an Augustinian revival of the doctrines of grace and predestination.

Another frequent concern is that, if it is true that unsaved people make genuine choices, even good moral choices such as choosing to be faithful to their spouses, then why is the first point of Calvinism true that they are unable to choose God on their own? I agree that they make good moral choices, but they do not make any meritorious choices. They do not do anything to commend themselves to God. Wesley and I would agree on that. I should be really careful. I did not do as well as I should have to present Arminian theology not as a merit theology or a works theology. It is not that. It is consistently a faith theology. The Bible tells us that the effects of the fall are such that we are capable of doing much

civic good and an unsaved person could be a wonderful neighbor. But we are unable to choose God because of how bad off we are due to the effects of the fall.

Now let us consider Romans 8:28-30 again: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Are we to understand “foreknew” here as precognition, the knowing of facts beforehand, specifically the knowing of people’s response to the Gospel beforehand? In other words, is it simply prescience, so that election is conditional? I do not deny that God has that knowledge of the future. But I do deny that election is conditioned upon human response because the Bible does not teach it. It seems to me that the best argument a Wesleyan could offer is that, though the Bible does not teach it, it has to be that way based upon other considerations, such as systematic theology. Such an appeal is not wrong in itself, but I argue that these passages preclude such an appeal being correct. I argue that the foreknowledge is not in the realm of a person knowing facts. Rather God is the subject of the five verbs in the passage and for each of them the people of God are the object. So the way of thinking about the meaning of foreknow is with a person as the knower and with a person or persons as the known. It is the knowledge of personal relationship. I am not denying that foreknow, the verb, or foreknowledge, the noun, could mean precognition. I am denying that these words do mean precognition in the context of the election passages in the New Testament.

Here are some other passages that speak of God knowing persons or not knowing persons that seem to use a similar meaning. Matthew 7:21-23 says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Jesus does not deny those supernatural works done in His name. He does, however, deny that He ever knew these people. This is certainly not the knowledge of facts because it would be a denial of Christ’s omniscience. It is the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior not knowing persons. The meaning is He did not save them although they professed to know Him. Until the judgment day they did not know Him. That is why I talked with uneasiness earlier about the “once saved always saved” terminology because it sometimes comes across as once professed, always saved and that is not the case biblically. There is false profession of faith in the Scriptures. Here is an example of it. They say, “Lord, Lord.” But He does not know them. Because of that they do not know Him.

You might argue that this is not “foreknow” or foreknowledge. It is just “to know.” There are very few uses of foreknow and foreknowledge in the Bible, so I am considering foreknow and foreknowledge in the broader range of verbs and nouns of knowing. In John 10 Jesus says, “I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” He is not speaking here just of knowing facts. He knows all facts. That is not denied. But He is not talking about that kind of knowledge. He is talking about the knowledge of personal relationship, the knowledge of salvation. It is knowledge of personal relationships so that when He knows or loves His people, they reciprocate—they love Him in return. Later in the chapter He also says, “My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish.”

One more passage is Galatians 4:9. Paul writes, “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?” He kind of catches himself in the middle in order to qualify his statement. In terms of knowing facts, God knew them as much before they were saved as after. I am not talking about that. I am talking about the knowledge of

personal relationship, even the knowledge of salvation. Notice that Paul catches himself and gives the priority, in terms of the knowledge of salvation, to God knowing them. He does not deny that they know God, but they know God only because God first knew them.

All this supports my understanding of “foreknow” as used in Romans 8—that the idea is of knowing a person. God knows every fact about everybody. This is a specific knowledge. I understand it to mean the knowledge of personal relationship, the knowledge of salvation. It is very close to saying that God foreloves His people, that He set His love upon them before the creation of the world. Such an idea is in Ephesians 1:4.

What is the basis of predestination according to Romans 8? Why did God choose His people? The passage does not say anything like He chose us because of any merit on our behalf. Evangelical Christians do not believe that. I will say it more plainly than I did before. Wesleyan theology is not a merit or works theology. I have had Calvinist students who present it that way. It is a misrepresentation. John Wesley’s theology is a consistent, free-will faith theology. It is not merit. It is based on faith or unbelief. What is the basis of predestination in this passage? If I am right about the notion of foreknowing, it is God’s love. If foreknow means to forelove His people, it is God’s love and His will that are the basis of predestination. Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. And remember those who love God are described as those who are called according to God’s purpose.

If you ask me why we are saved, there are a number of good responses to that question. Why am I saved? I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a correct answer. Is it the ultimate answer? No, it is not. I am saved because somebody was kind enough to bring the Gospel to me. Is that a true answer? Yes. Is it the ultimate answer? No. Why am I saved more ultimately? Jesus Christ died and rose again to save me. Ultimately it is not my faith that saves me. It is my faith in what Jesus did. You can have mountains of faith in the wrong savior, in the wrong object, and not be saved. Luther said, “A little bit of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ saves.” He was right. So looking further back, it is because Jesus loved me and gave Himself for me and rose again that I am saved. Is that the ultimate answer the Bible gives to the question of why I am saved? No. The Bible takes us back to the mysterious idea that, before the creation of the world, God chose me and loved me. It looks to me like the ultimate answer to the question of why am I saved is the love that is the grace and the sovereignty of God. Does that tell us all the answers that we might want to know? No. It does not tell us, for example, why in the world God did choose us. I cannot answer that one. And if you knew me better, you would say, “I do not know why he chose you, Peterson.” Because God loved you and He chose you. That is why. The Bible does not seem to give any more ultimate answer than that.

This passage also gives the goal of predestination in two different ways. First of all, it is conformity to Christ. “Those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.” Predestination is for conformity to the image of Christ, which I take to mean that we will be made like Him in holiness. It is at least that, perhaps including other ideas as well. The goal of predestination is conformity to Christ in holiness. It is also glorification according to this passage because those whom God foreknew He predestined, called, justified, and glorified. So God has goals in what He is doing. Remember that earlier we said it seems to be a chain where the links are connected and cannot be separated. The people who are foreloved on the one hand do not fail to be glorified on the other.

An interesting way to approach predestination is in considering God’s choice of His Old Testament people, Israel, in light of their repeated failure. How do we understand foreknowledge, or God foreknowing them in light of the fact that they rebelled against God and ultimately rejected His Son?

The idea that God chose Israel because He foresaw they were going to be a faithful people does not work in terms of the Old Testament information. He knew what the future held. He chose them anyway because He is a gracious God. The Old Testament counterpart to the gracious election of God is not a perfect parallel because the Old Testament election was national. The statement in Deuteronomy is this: "I did not choose you because you are a mighty nation. I chose you because you were the smallest nation." He is the kind of God who picks an apparent loser and makes a winner out of him or her, though I admit Israel's failures. The first elected Israelite in terms of that Old Testament theme applied to the nation was Abraham. According to the book of Joshua, he was chosen when he was still on the other side of the river and his father was an idol worshipper. So it magnifies the grace of God.

The New Testament says that not all Israel is Israel. That is, we would distinguish between a national election, and within that, a subset of the people of God who are a faithful remnant. We could describe them in two ways: in terms of God's sovereignty, and in terms of human responsibility. Both perspectives are biblical and both of which we need to have a balanced presentation on things. Our present study is somewhat one-sided and that is what makes some of you nervous. But we are studying what the Bible teaches about election and it just does not have to do with us except that we are the recipients of God's grace. It has to do with God choosing us.

In terms of human responsibility, those Israelites who were unfaithful to the Lord, who rejected the Lord, got what was coming to them. In terms of God's sovereignty, He preserved a faithful remnant to Himself. It was because of His grace that they did not worship idols and go the way of the others.

One more issue from Romans 8 is God's means of reaching this goal. This is a so-called *ordo salutis*, the order of salvation. God not only sets goals for Himself, but He also uses means to attain His goals. He uses means to reach His ends. His end is our ultimate conformity to the likeness of Christ. His end is our glorification. Therefore, those He foreknew and predestined, He called and justified. Foreknowing and predestining His people happened before creation. Glorification happens at the other end. Those take place in eternity past and eternity future, if we can talk like that. What about calling and justification? They happen in time and space. While these questions are not really our topics of study, I wanted to at least talk a little bit about them that you might understand.

Here is my understanding of the five verbs of the passage in Romans 8. God set His love upon His people before the creation of the world. Those He set His love upon He chose to be saved, He predestined them. Those whom He chose, He called. It is evident in Romans 9 as well that the Bible sometimes draws a line connecting God's pre-creation choosing to His calling of people in time and space. Calling here is the effective summoning of people who do not know the Lord to the knowledge of God. We will hit more about that in Romans 9. He called those people. He effectively drew them to Himself. John's word in the Gospel of John is that He summoned His people to Himself. That is, He gave them ears to hear. He gave them eyes to see. He caused the Gospel to make sense to them. A friend of mine described his experience, in which he went to a Bible-believing church for an entire year before he was saved. He said, "That Sunday God turned the lights on." He did not mean they were worshipping in the dark. He meant God turned the lights on inside of his own heart. He was giving God the credit for making the first move even in applying His grace to his life.

It also says God justified. Justification is the gracious work of God whereby He declares righteous everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those whom God set His love upon beforehand He chose to be saved. He effectively summoned them to Himself. He called them. He declared them righteous by virtue of the righteousness of Christ. He justified them. And the amazing thing is those same ones He also glorified. It is in the same simple past tense. He caused them to see the glory of

Christ, the glory of the exalted Christ in heaven, and to be changed by that vision of God so that they become partakers of His glory. The miracle is that this future glorification could also be expressed by a simple past tense verb. The meaning is that their glorification, although future, is certain in the plan of God. That is, they cannot fall away from grace.

I am ready to move on from Romans 8. I want to speak to why we should evangelize. If what I say is true, is there a danger of cutting the nerve cord of evangelism? We know that the Bible plainly teaches the church's responsibility to evangelize. Have Calvinists always been faithful in that? I answer to my shame it is a hyper-Calvinism that indeed has cut the nerve cord of the Gospel. So the worst fears of Arminian Christians and just regular Christians who never even thought these things through in great depth is confirmed by historic groups of Calvinists. Some still hold this view, I am sad to say. So the question is, why evangelize?

First, we evangelize because of our ignorance. God does the work of electing, especially God the Father. God the Son does the work of redemption. God the Holy Spirit is the great opener of hearts. We do not do any of that and we are ignorant of the identity of the people God has chosen. We do not know who the elect are. Spurgeon, the great Baptist Calvinist preacher of the end of the last century in Great Britain, used the image that we cannot go around and pull up men's shirttails and see a big "E" written there for the elect. It does not work that way. God has His people out there. We do not know who they are. We are not God. We neither elect nor make atonement, nor are we the Holy Spirit either. God does those works. He has told us in His word that He does those things. We believe that they are true. We give the Gospel freely to all people whom God brings into our path and we look for God to work.

A second reason we evangelize is the fact that God uses means. I am not interested in trying to figure out what other means God could have used. Could He have sprinkled angel dust on people and brought them to Himself? I do not know. Maybe He could have. I want to know what He did do. He did plan whatever means were at His disposal to use person-to-person contact to bring people to Himself. There are two kinds of people in the world, and they are both sinners. They are forgiven sinners, and as yet unforgiven sinners. It is God's plan for flesh and blood human beings who have tasted His grace and know His forgiveness to share His love with other human beings who do not know His grace and who have not experienced His forgiveness.

Why do we think it is strange that God uses means? Some have expressed the thought that if God has chosen people then we do not have to witness. Why would you conclude that? Consider these parallels from the great old Princeton theologian Charles Hodge. If I asked you where your ultimate confidence for the preservation of your life and health is, every person would say your ultimate confidence is in the Lord God almighty. If that is the case, somehow we do not find that incompatible with our sleeping every day and with our eating each day. We use means, do we not? The apostle expected the believers to use means. Regarding those who were so spiritual in 2 Thessalonians 3 that they did not want to work, Paul said not to let them eat and when their hunger catches up with their spirituality they will get busy for the Lord. God's sovereignty is no reason for us to be lax in our human responsibility. God uses means. If I asked you where your ultimate confidence for the provision of your family's needs is, every person would say the Lord is our provider. Your confidence is in God's sovereign care of your family. Somehow we all find that perfectly compatible with our exercising human responsibility and going to work. Every day we rest in God our Father and Provider to take care of us individually and to provide for our family's well-being. Yet we find no problem with understanding at the same time that God uses means. We eat. We sleep. Hopefully we exercise and take care of ourselves. We do not abuse our bodies with alcohol and drugs so as to shorten our lifespan and our effectiveness for God, recognizing our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We go to work. We work hard to provide for the family. But that

is not the ultimate confidence in God's providing for us. It is in God's own goodness and promise to take care of us.

I have a third reason why we are to evangelize. If Calvinism is true then it breeds confidence. While I do not know who the people of God are out there, I can go in the will of God to wherever He sends me with confidence. Since God's grace is irresistible, God will bring His people to Himself. Instead of stultifying evangelism, the Reformed faith should form the basis for vigorous evangelism. I am ashamed at the answer the Congregationalist church, which was Calvinist, gave to William Carey when he wanted to take the Gospel across the globe. They said, "Young man, when God wants to convert the heathen He will do it without you or without us." Instead they should have said, "Young man, praise God for your faithfulness to the Great Commission. God has, a long time ago, commanded us to take the Gospel to the whole world. Go with our blessing and preach the true Gospel and look for God to bring His people to Himself through your ministry."

We do not know who the people of God are so we just love people and we witness. How do I know that I am chosen? Calvin had a good answer. He said, "Christ is the mirror of our election." Did we figure out that we were chosen by going back and prying into God's eternal councils? No, that is not what the Bible tells us. We are not God, we are not His equal, and we cannot go back and figure out God's mind before the creation of the world. Calvin called that the maze, the labyrinth in which we get lost. Do you want to have a headache? Try to figure out what God was doing before creation. Augustine had a good quip for that when scoffers asked that question. His answer was that God was preparing a hell for those who scoff at His grace.

The Bible tells us how we can know we were chosen. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4 Paul says, "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you." Does it say we know because we have figured out the divine mind and searched out the inscrutable and figured out exactly what He did before the creation? Notice how love and choosing go side by side. Here is how we know whom God has chosen: "Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." The only way we know that people are elected is when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If Augustinian theology is correct as understood by Luther and Calvin, the only reason we believe the Gospel is because the Father chose us in His sovereign grace before the creation of the world. We know people are part of the elect when they believe. That is where our seminary stands as well, though if you disagree with me strongly in the end, I hope you will love me. I will want to love you in the Lord because we have the Lord Jesus, and so many other things, in common. So fellowship is not at stake here.

Be careful, however, because you can be fooled. Judas fooled the other 11 apostles. They certainly thought he was a man of God. Matthew, the former tax collector, would not have been able to go to sleep at night knowing that the keeper of the purse was a thief. Judas was a thief all along the way. John 12:6 says he was a thief and he used to help himself to what was in the common purse. It was his custom. If somebody broke into a church and robbed the church, almost anybody would say that it is really terrible to rob the Lord's money. Judas was robbing the Lord's money in the most immediate way possible—the Lord Jesus' money. Judas fooled them all. So we never presume.

On the other hand, there is the dying thief. Who would have thought he was saved. If his own mother was a godly Israelite she would have said he was a bad boy. He took other people's lives. He was getting what he deserved. But Jesus knew all that and the man was saved. What a platform for evangelism. That is just incredible. Jesus witnessed to him from the cross and the man believed in Christ. And Jesus promised him, "You will be with me this day in paradise." There is an example of the man being

justified and almost immediately being glorified. His period of sanctification was very short, maybe the shortest on record. But it was very real. He began to speak well of the Savior. He rebuked the other thief. They both were mocking Jesus for a while and he began to speak well of Christ. “Remember me, Lord, when you come into your kingdom.” And Christ said that He would. So we never give up hope until people have passed away. And even then we leave them with God.

Ephesians 1 is another great election passage. As we think about this passage, help me discern its structure, please. I jokingly refer to it as my favorite passage because it contains all the doctrines I teach, or at least many of them. Tell me the refrain that comes up a few times that can give us a way of outlining the passage. Ephesians 1:3-14 says,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

What is the phrase that appears a number of times? It is not “in Christ.” It is not “chose.” Those do appear. It is the expression in verse 6, “To the praise of His glorious grace.” It is also in verse 12, “For the praise of His glory.” And it is at the end of verse 14, “To the praise of His glory.” Thus, if we attend to these, we have three sections: verses 3-6, verses 6-12, and verses 13 and 14. What person of the Godhead is most emphasized in the first paragraph? It is God the Father. What about in the second paragraph? It is Jesus. It is in the second one alone that we read of His redemption. Jesus, of course, is in all three paragraphs. He is all over the place, but it actually speaks of redemption through His blood only in that second one. Where does the Holy Spirit come in? He is in the third paragraph alone.

What work of the Father is spoken of in the first paragraph? It speaks of the Father’s election of His people. What work of the Son is spoken of in the second paragraph? It is His work of redemption. What work of the Spirit is mentioned in the third paragraph? It is his work of sealing. I suggest to you that there is a Trinitarian structure to this passage and that it teaches us about the grace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It stresses the Father’s grace in election, the Son’s grace in redemption, and the Spirit’s grace in sealing. Technically the Father seals us with the seal, who is the Holy Spirit.