**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon Series**

**Paul’s Letter to The Saints in Ephesus**

*Chapter 1:1-5 – God’s Love Chose Us First*

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July 18th In the Year of Our Lord - (Anno Domini A.D.) 2021

(Unless otherwise noted, CSB17 is quoted.)

CSB: Christian Standard Bible

 A few weeks ago, we started our sermon series in the New Testament book of Ephesians. To set the context correctly, we reviewed Paul’s “farewell address” to the Elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:18-38). Paul had spent three years in Ephesus during his missionary journeys. Ephesus was one of his last stops in route back to Jerusalem where he was arrested by the Jewish authorities. Paul, a Roman citizen by birth, appealed his case to Caesar. Thus, Paul writes his letter to the Believers in Ephesus while under house arrest in Rome awaiting his hearing in front of Caesar. During this time, Paul is allowed to have guests and write. Paul’s letters are filled with the theological teachings of which he had previously laid a foundation in Ephesus and throughout all the lands he traveled during his missionary journeys. We see here in this letter the context of the Old Testament and what came to be known as the New Testament come together.

 This starts with an understanding of who God is as Creator, Father, Jesus Christ (Son/Messiah) and Holy Spirit. In previous sermons, we have highlighted the power and authority Paul ministered – which is under God’s grace and peace. These two attributes of God may not be viewed as power and authority, but they have power and authority over the law of sin and death. This is the crucial victory for all of humanity. We will focus on verse 4-5, and its game-changing message.

**Ephesians**

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will:

To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus.

 2 Grace to you and peace

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

 3 Blessed [*Praise to*] is the God and Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ, (JC)

who has blessed [*gave favor too*] us

with every spiritual blessing

in the heavens in Christ.

 **4 For he (God) chose us in him (JC),**

**before the foundation of the world,**

**to be holy and blameless in love**

**before him (God).**

 **5 He (God) predestined us to be adopted as sons**

**through Jesus Christ for himself (God),**

**according to the good pleasure of his (God) will,**

**Elohim in Ephesians 1:4**

**Presence of the Trinity from before the Foundation of the World**

**From John 1:1-5 and Genesis 1:1-3,** we have the key to understanding Ephesians 1:4, which is to understand God’s *omniscience*, *omnipotent* and *omnipresence* which are all part of being God. This also directly highlights the Oneness of God’s Trinitarianism - God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We know from John 1:1-5 that all things were made by Jesus Christ and that Jesus Christ “is” the *Word* and the *Light* that came into the dark World, and the darkness did not comprehend it. John 1 ties directly to Genesis 1:1-3 – *“In the beginning”*, when Elohim (Hebrew: plural form for God) created the world, His Spirit moved over the surface of the waters. Therefore, all three manifestations/forms/realities (persons) of God were present before the formation of the World. By name - God/Jesus created and their Spirit moved over the surface of the waters.

**Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth.2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (NAU)

I know this is a lot for many Christians to articulate. These truths about God are beyond the ability of humans to fully define. God is not restrained in the ways or methods in which He reveals Himself. God is not limited to time, space or form. Paul writes to the Believers in Corinth. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6-9; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16)

**Jesus Christ in Ephesians 1:4**

In verse 4, Paul is projecting God’s own *incarnation* as Jesus Christ which God knew from before the foundation of the world would take place (“God chose us in Him”). God, being *all-knowing*, knew humanity, “with a choice” would fall, thus needing a Savior.

In God’s omniscience (All-Knowing), he knew Adam and Eve and all people would rebel against His plan for their lives. God was willing for the Creation to be managed in this way because of His great love. God desires for us to choose His love through other choices. We cannot emphasize enough that love is not love unless it is a choice, particularly chosen through adversity. God, incarnated as Jesus, shows us how this is possible with His Spirit indwelling us (Romans 8:1-3,9; Galatians 2:20).

Therefore, God, from before the foundation of the world, knew that He would incarnate Himself as a person to demonstrate how His plan for our lives could be lived in a fallen world. In addition, God knew and planned to go to the Cross and pay our debt for sin, so we would not have to perform meritorious acts to pay our own debt for our sin. Unfortunately, not everyone surrenders (unconditionally) to God and accesses the forgiving power of the Cross of God as Jesus Christ.

**So, why did God create a world that He knew would rebel against Him?**

**Why Did God Create Us? Love.**

 God is love (1 John 4:8), and we are created in God’s image; therefore, God created us to experience love – to experience the one overriding-fallen-world-attribute of Him. We will never be God, nor should we strive to be God. In God’s grace (unmerited favor), He made it possible for us to choose love. God’s love is a choice and cannot be bought or earned. Love is the only way we have victory in this fallen world. You cannot create love in a test-tube or manufacture it in a Petrie dish. For us to experience love, we have to choose love. I cannot define love any better than God has in 1 Corinthians 13. I see this passage as a description of who God is and who He wants us to be.

 Love is such an enigma for fallen humanity. From where does love come? Why do we have access to love? Paul declares that we do not have all the answers.

**1 Corinthians 13:9-13 (NAU)** 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. 11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

**God’s wants people to freely choose Him and His ways – to operate life with His love.**

**God Chose “All of US” First** (See 1 John 4:19)

**4 For he (God) chose us in him (JC), before the foundation of the world,**

**to be holy and blameless in love before him (God).**

**5 He (God) predestined us to be adopted as sons**

**through Jesus Christ for himself (God),**

**according to the good pleasure of his (God) will,**

**Understanding what Predestination is and is not -**

**Balanced with God’s Omniscience (Foreknowledge) since before the Foundation of the World through Jesus Christ**

Basically, God accepts people as justified to Him if they have surrendering-heart-felt faith in Him. God knows who the Saved are, but we do not have the official rollcall (Lamb’s Book of Life).

Before God created Adam and Eve, He chose them to live sinless lives in the Garden of Eden. Remember that God loved (chose) us first (1 John 4:19). God waits for our surrendering response. God chose Pharaoh, Cain, Herod, Judas to live sinless lives. God gave them all a choice to surrender to Him and allow His Holy Spirit to direct their lives. If they capitulated to God then they were predestined for good. However, they and Adam/Eve did not surrender to God. Instead, they surrendered to Satan’s offer to rebel against God. Therefore, they were predestined for separation from God and to have sin and death rule their lives (Genesis 2:17; Chapter 3).

Like Adam and Eve, those who exchanged “The Creator” for the creation - God has ‘turned over’ to their own desires (Romans 1:18ff). But this is of their own choosing. Paul writes about God’s foreknowledge (omniscience) in Romans 8:29-30.(CSB17)

 29 For those he **foreknew** he also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

We see here in Romans 8:29 that God’s *foreknowledge* comes before a person is predestined to *conformity in Jesus*. This is vitally important in understanding that God does not force (Elect) a person to be saved. In God’s *omniscience,* He knows who will choose him from the time before the foundation of the world. We see that God as Jesus knew from the beginning who would not accept His full teaching in John 6:64,65. We also see here in John that Jesus points to God as the “Father” in vetting people’s sincerity of belief. Of course, God has the Lamb’s Book of Life with the names of true Believers. This *book of life* in contrast to the *books of deeds* is open for judgment in Revelation 20:11ff.

God also knows who will worship the Devil. There are many passages containing “*from the foundation of the world*” and Ephesian 1:4 states “*from before the foundation of the world*”.

(Matthew 13:35, 25:34; Luke 11:50; Hebrews 4:3, 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20)

**Revelations 13:8** All those who live on the earth will worship it, everyone whose name was not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered.

**Revelations 17:8** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up from the abyss and go to destruction. Those who live on the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast that was, and is not, and is to come.

Like Adam and Eve, God chooses for all people to have a relationship with Him. This is why God created us in His image. God loves us and desires for us to freely choose Him and His plan for our lives. God lets us decide if we want to surrender to Him and His plan for our lives. However, like Adam and Eve, all people chose to rebel against God. Genesis 2, 3 and 4 are accounts of the *choice* of mankind, the *Fall* and *separation* of humanity from God, and the generational *results* of the Fall (Cain murders Abel).

Ephesians 1:4-5 summarizes centuries of God’s interaction with His creation. We need to go slow with our witness to people. Remember Paul’s farewell address to the Elders of Ephesus. He spoke in terms they understood after he spent three years with them. When Paul writes the letter that we know as Ephesians, from his Roman imprisonment, he communicates a message that has its context understood by the recipients due to his previous teaching.

**Through Jesus Christ – Ephesians 1:5**

This is a most defining point in God’s predestination. Predestination is qualified to be accessed through Jesus Christ. Whether a person knows God as Jesus paid the price for their sins on the Cross or not, the price was still paid, in blood, and is good for all people through all-time. God holds all people accountable for what they know. We know what God accomplished as Jesus on the Cross. Most people in our times know about the Cross of God. The Cross paid the price of sin for all people who lived before and after the time of the Cross. So, how do people who lived in times before the Cross, with no knowledge of the Jesus story, gain access to the saving power of the Cross? By Faith in God. We see this in Abel described in Hebrews 11. Abel’s faith predestined him for glory. This does not mean that in our times a person can reject the Cross after possessing knowledge of the Cross. Again, God holds us accountable for what we know.

**Hebrews 11:1** Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

 2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

 (NAU)

 We need to remember that God as Jesus stated in John 14:6 that He was the *only way* to the Father. We also see God as Jesus to be the Judge at the Great White Throne Judgement in Revelation 20, of which, no one gets past unless He (Jesus) allows them due to their names being recorded in the Book of Life. For a person’s name to be recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life, they need to have surrendered their heart to God by calling upon Him (Romans 10:13). In God’s omniscience, He knows who these people are. This is not a physical act but a spiritual-humble-poor-in-spirit calling from a person whose heart is pierced responding to the conviction of God’s Holy Spirit - thus, calling to Him – “What must we do?” (Acts 2:37). Now, a person is predestined for glory.

**The summation:** God is love and created us in His image and chose ***all*** of us to have a loving relationship with Him and each other for an eternity.

16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

 17 By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

 19 We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:16-19 NAU)

God created us with a free-will-choice (Genesis 2:17) to surrender to Him and His ways, or we are free to rebel against Him and be ‘turned over’ to our own desires (Genesis 3, Romans 1:18ff). Either way, we are free to choose our own eternal destination. Once we have surrendered to God, we are predestined for glory.

God does not force anyone to surrender to Him. God knows (omniscience) who the Believers are, He knows the rebellious, and He knows the pretenders (John 6:64). We must call upon God with a surrendering heart. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13), but this call is vetted by God (John 6:65). God knows our hearts. When we make this call, we have surrendered our will to be *born-again*. This is what God as Jesus told Nicodemus chronicled in John 3. A person must be willing to have God circumcise their heart so they can walk in His ways (Deuteronomy 30:6, Ezekiel 36, John 3, Acts 2). The Apostle Paul declares that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ lives in him.

**Galatians 2:20** "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (NAU)

**And all the Saints said . . . Amen**