

His Chosen People

by J. Sidlow Baxter

The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness in the Christian life and the mystery of pre-mundane divine election, highlighting the significance of the verb 'he hath chosen' and the purpose of election as bringing the Church into a union with Christ.

Duration: 52:32

Scripture: Matthew 7:13, Matthew 23:5, Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "Chosen People"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of fully surrendering to Christ after conversion. They encourage the audience to yield their souls, bodies, minds, and brains to Jesus in a careful and unemotional manner. The speaker highlights the power of God's love to cleanse, fill, renew, and sanctify believers. They also discuss the concept of divine election in Christ, using the Greek language to explain its meaning and significance. The sermon concludes with an exploration of the verb 'hath elected' and its profound implications.

Transcript

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4. I think I'll wait until you find it. There's heavenly music to my ears in the rustle of those Bible pages. Well now, here it is, Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 4. According as he, that is God, hath chosen or elected us, that is us Christian believers, in him, that is in Christ, before the foundation of the world, with this tremendous objective in view, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him, not just before men.

That is where, long ago, the at first well-meaning but latterly hypocritical Pharisees went tragically wrong. They wanted a demonstrative sanctity merely before men, that we should be holy, and without blame, before God, before him, in love. Now, don't you agree? Is not that an inexpressibly tremendous statement of truth? And before I dare to make my first reverent comment upon it, let me slowly read it once again.

According as he hath chosen us, in him, from before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame, before him, in love. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, if there is one thing more than another about which all of us Christian believers should be continually concerned, it is our inward and outward holiness of heart and life, our true and practical sanctification of character and conduct. Other things may have their due and related importance, but beyond any peradventure, this is our priority concern number one.

Before our giving, or going, or serving, or anything else, God calls you and me to a life of inwrought and then outwrought sanctification. And therefore, unless you and I are living in the experience of true sanctification, we cannot be fully pleasing to our Heavenly Father, nor can we be fully satisfying to the heart of our dear Master, nor can we be fully usable in the hand of the Holy Spirit. I reiterate with affectionate emphasis, brothers and sisters in our holy calling, before all else, God calls you and me to be a holy people.

Whether we are younger or older, whether we are richer or poorer, whether we are well or ill, whether we are here rejoicing in wonderful prosperity, or whether we are here with a broken heart through recent bereavement, sympathetically and with fatherly love and with uncompromising concern for our well-being, God calls you and me, before all else, to a life of experiential holiness. Therefore, you and I should be exceedingly concerned to find out what the New Testament really teaches about this sensitively sacred matter, and having found out what holiness really is, we should seek to receive the blessing and to live in the experience of it. Don't you think so? Yes.

Well, now, the text which we have just consulted together, that magnificent Ephesians 1, 4, is one of many verses in the New Testament calling us, challenging us, alluring us, wooing us, commanding us, inciting us. To holiness, and therefore I want us to look all the more carefully at it. Now, of course, dear friends, as you all know by now, I am a preacher of sorts, and of course I just can't help it, when I let my eyes linger on a profound verse like this, I just can't help it, I have to look at the text.

Exegetically, analytically, homiletically, expositoryly, etc., and when I look a little observantly at this verse, the first thing that I notice, indeed can't escape, is that in this verse there are two great matters. The first is that inscrutably mysterious matter of a pre-mundane divine election of all Christian believers in Christ. Before ever the first sunrise broke upon that lovely, pristine paradise in the Garden of Eden, before time itself began, you and I were in the mind and heart and thought and love and purpose of God.

Mystery? I should say so. Unfathomable mystery. But it's clearly there in the verse.

The other great matter in this verse is the ethical objective of that pre-mundane divine election. God's choice, election, was not merely capricious. It had a moral objective, and it was this, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

I take another glance at this verse, and I'm rather intrigued by the fact that although it is a considerable-sized statement of truth, there is in it only one verb. Did you happen to have noticed that? It's the verb, he hath chosen. Three words in the English, but only one word in the Greek, because in the Greek the pronoun he is implicit in the verb.

Well now, that is the one verb, and it is central to everything. He hath chosen, or he elected, just as Venus and the Earth and Mars and Jupiter and Saturn and Uranus and faraway Neptune and the minor planets all range round that huge fiery magnet which we call the sun and receive their continuing illumination from it, so in this verse everything else swings around that central verb, he hath chosen, or putting it in purely grammatical phraseology, everything else in the verb is what we call adverbial amplification. I mean this, if you should ask, how did God choose us? The first adverbial phrase replies, He chose us in Him, Christ.

He knew that we could never make ourselves holy, so He had to provide holiness for us in Christ. If you should ask, when did God choose us? The second adverbial phrase replies, before the foundation of the world. If you should ask, why did God choose us? The third adverbial amplification replies, that we should

be holy and without blame before Him in love.

So that here you have the how and the when and the where of divine election in Christ. Come to think of it, do you know friends, I think we ought to linger at that verb and deliberately encounter it. You heard the expression that there can be a world in a word, well so there can, and there can be an ocean in a tear, and there can be an earthquake in a sob, and there can be a whirlwind in a sigh, and there can be a volume in a verb, and so there is here.

Oh, it's a great verb this is. Are you interested in it? Let me point out just three things about this verb as it occurs in the Greek. One, in the Greek it is in the aorist tense.

Now we do not have anything in our English grammar quite paralleling with the Greek aorist. We have the past tense and the present tense and the future tense, but nothing quite corresponding to the Greek aorist. Now the Greek aorist is one of what we call, forgive me, the punctiliar tenses.

Punctiliar, punct means a point. It refers to a point, and it's to a point in the past. The connotation of the aorist tense is something that happened at a certain point, a complete action, completely done, and completely over.

That's the aorist. I daren't say that in strict grammar it also contains the idea of once for all, but in its context that's just what it does mean over and over and over again. And that's the sense here.

Before ever time began, God chose you and me in Christ once for all. Why, evidently and obviously, if He chose us, and He's not just choosing us now continuously, if He chose us before ever time began, it must have been a completed act and therefore once for all. Now, I'm remembering, of course, that we are at Philae, and we are a wonderful theological conglomeration here.

There are Methodists and there are Baptists. I met between one and two hundred of them this afternoon. And, oh, my precious Ethel and I had a rapturous time.

They were members of our former flocks in Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, and Bethesda Free Church in Sunderland. Oh, well, I mustn't get on to that, but I'm very comforted to know there is such a contingent of healthy Baptists here. And then, of course, there'll be Salvationists and probably Brethren, Plymouth Brethren.

And there'll be Anglicans and there'll be others. And some of us, if we are true to our denominational and theological lineage, are Arminian from John Wesley. And others of us are Calvinists from John Calvin.

Now, with all respect to Arminius and all respect to John Calvin, I'm not concerned tuppence tonight whether I agree with either one of them or either of them agrees with me. I'm only concerned with what's in the text. I once made a vow that I would never let any theological school or denominational connection prevent me from seeing what is clearly in the book.

Now, I'm not either commending or condemning either Arminianism or Calvinism. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised if very few of us here know much about either. Maybe I ought just to remind you that Arminianism, that theological system, has always laid great stress upon the freedom of the human will, and rightly so.

And going with that, it says that you can be saved and then lost again. Now, Calvinism has always put the weight of emphasis on the divine sovereignty, and the corollary of that is the teaching that once saved, you're saved forever. Now, I'm not going to start arguing either one way or the other.

Was it the late Dr. Luke Wiseman, and he was a good healthy Methodist, was it he who told us about the third verse in a hymn, in an old ragged Baptist hymnal that he picked up in Cheshire somewhere, the third verse said, I'd rather be a Baptist and have a smiling face than be among the Methodists and fall away from grace. And, of course, you know that verse, it was built upon the battle that was then going on between Calvinism and Arminianism. I'll tell you the attitude I like.

You know, the greatest revival of true New Testament religion that ever swept over the British Isles was what we now call the Methodist or Wesleyan revival. But let's never forget that revival didn't just come through John and Charles Wesley. Equally so, it came through that mightiest open air preacher who has ever been in the history of the Church, George Whitefield.

Now, John Wesley was Arminian, and George Whitefield was Calvinist. And one of these naughty people who liked to set one preacher off against another once said to John Wesley, Mr. Wesley, do you think you'll see George Whitefield in heaven? And John Wesley pondered. And then, with corresponding gravity, and I incline to think with a tear trickling down his cheek, he said, Shall I see George Whitefield in heaven? No, my brother, I don't think I shall.

He'll be so near to the throne, and I'll be so far away, I doubt whether I'll ever get a glimpse of him. Oh, brothers and sisters, that's better than fighting about systems, isn't it? Well now, having said that, to just smooth your feathers a little, I only want to say this, that whether you're Methodist or Baptist, Arminian or Calvinist, I don't care whether you are going to do it or not, but I'm going to suck the honey out of this flower. I'm going to rest my grateful heart on this text.

It says that before ever time began, my heavenly Father chose me in Christ, aorist tense, once for all, never to let me down, and never to give me up, and never to let me go. Amen. Is there a doubting Thomas here tonight? Or a doubting Thomasina? You are a believer in the Lord Jesus.

You'd never dream of trusting anyone other than Himself for your salvation. And you're saved, but you're not quite sure of it. And therefore, you don't have what our Baptist and Methodist and Anglican and Presbyterian forefathers used to call, you don't have the assurance of faith.

And therefore, this is your experience, sometimes trusting, sometimes doubting, and therefore sometimes singing, other times sighing, sometimes leaping, sometimes limping, sometimes rejoicing, sometimes repining. Sometimes exulting, sometimes almost expiring. Now, the Lord never meant that up and down and up and on experience.

He wanted us to know that we are saved and that He'll never, never, never, never, never let us down. So He put it in the Aorist tense. But now, let me mention a second feature in this text, as it occurs in the Greek.

It is not only in the Aorist tense, it is in the middle voice. Oh, says somebody, what on earth is the middle voice? Well now, don't wilt with undue perturbation, because I can quite easily tell you what the middle voice is. It's the one that comes between the other two.

Now, I'm sure you'll all agree that was most enlightening. But now, if I may get you serious again, as a matter of fact, that is literally true. You see, once again, there's a point of difference here between Greek grammar and our English.

In the English, we have the two voices of the verb, the active voice and the passive voice, but we don't have the middle voice. Now, we say that a verb is in the active voice when the subject acts or does something through the verb to the object, as in the simple sentence, the boy, subject, kicked, in which the subject goes out through the verb, kicked the dog, the unhappy object. So we say that in that case, the verb is in the active voice.

And by a very simple transposition, we can turn the active into the passive. In the equally simple sentence, the boy, still the subject, was bitten by. Now, you see, the subject, instead of acting through the verb, sustains something through the verb from the predicate.

The boy, subject, was bitten by the dog. And serve him jolly well, right? But we have nothing between the two. Now, the Greek has.

You know, it's always a wonderful thing to me that when God wanted to put his word into language, he chose the most expressive and flexible and eloquent and varied language ever known, the Greek. Now, this is the middle voice. How can I describe it? It's something like a boomerang.

Out it goes, and then it comes back. It has a reflexive operation. I think I can best do it by quoting the text itself.

Listen. God, there's the subject, hath elected, out goes the subject through the verb, hath elected us in Christ, and then it swings back with this meaning, to be his very own. Have you got it? Now, I believe it's Weymouth who gets the sense of it and puts it admirably into English.

Wait a minute. Let me ask you, are you enjoying my Greek class? Oh, we'll have you all learned up before you go home. But now, let me just mention a third feature of this verb.

Not only is it in the Aorist tense, and not only is it in the middle voice, in the original Greek, it is a compound verb, or to be more explicit, it has the preposition ek, or ex, prefixed to it. Now, you know that whether in Greek, Latin, or English, ek or ex means out of. An exit is not just a way, it is a way out of.

When I excavate, I don't just dig a hole, I out-dig, excavate. Now, this is one of the ek verbs of the New Testament. Are you listening? God hath ex, elected.

He has chosen us out of. Oh, says somebody, now, Mr. Preacher, tread carefully, you're on thin ice. Now, Mr. Preacher, go warily, you're at the edge of the precipice.

Are you meaning that God has chosen a comparatively infinitesimal minority, us Christian believers, and that all the other millions and billions from Adam until now are all predestined to an ever-ending damnation in Gehenna, beyond the grave? Oh, Mr. Preacher, be careful. Well, dear Mr. and Mrs. Hearer, your preacher will tread carefully, but may I remind you, so long as we keep carefully with the Word, we are not on thin ice, we are on the rock of ages. Now, let's get this clear once for all.

Our dear old Bible nowhere says that God ever predestined any one of his creatures to Gehenna. I'm not saying it in any spirit of bravado. I challenge any man on the planet to show me any place in the Bible

which comes within a million miles of even suggesting such a monstrosity as that God predestined any of his creatures to that eternal damnation.

You know, I often think our Bible has suffered far more from its friends than its enemies. We will either lag behind it or run beyond it, instead of keeping strictly with it. I haven't time to go into this because it's not germane to our present theme, but I must just put this in by way of insertion very quickly.

What the Bible does teach is that at that strange dissolution which we call the death of the body, the disembodied soul, that is, the self-conscious human being, now in bodiless form, passes into Hades. That's true of all but Christians. In the case of born-again Christian believers, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

But in the case of all others, the disembodied human ego passes into Hades, and that is the place of temporary detention between the death of the body here and the final general judgment of the human race at the great white throne. And there is no final judgment upon any human being until then, and the fires of Gehenna are not yet lit. And they were never meant for human beings, they were meant for the devil and his angels, Matthew 25.

There are human beings who will go, if I read my Bible correctly, and oh, what an inexpressibly fearful doom and tragedy that is. All I'm saying is, the Bible teaching is clear. All the departed, all but Christian believers, they pass into Hades and they remain there until the final general judgment of the human race.

Now, we must leave that subject there because I want now to come back to this. This matter of election in the New Testament is not a matter of either damnation or salvation. It is something that has exclusive reference to the Church.

Why? Do I need to remind you the very word for the Church in the Greek is the Ekklesia, the called-out ones. And this is the true wonder of election. Almighty, all-knowing God, who knows the end from the beginning and who knows the reactions of the human will, both racially and individually, from the beginning to the end of time, God who foreknows everything, he has superimposed upon human history this great purpose, that there is to be one select group of human beings called out and brought into such wonderful union with his eternal Son, that the only way you can express that union is to say, he is the bridegroom and they're the bride.

He is the foundation and they're the building. He is the head and they're the body. Head and body, a living union.

Foundation and building, a lasting union. Bridegroom and bride, a loving union. Now, the wonderful thing about this divine election is that you and I, hell-deserving sinners though we are, having become washed in the crimson of Calvary, having become born into new spiritual life by the regenerating Spirit, we are brought into that indissoluble union with God's dear Son.

And in the final consummation, you and I, as the people of Christ, we are going to be lifted above angels and principalities and powers, above the seraphim and the cherubim, and we are going to be in that eternal oneness of everlasting glory with God the Son. Oh, that's the marvel of election! Now, friends, think of this. God has chosen you and me, heiress, once for all in Christ.

Doesn't that make you want to be holy? Two, he chose you and me, middle boys, to be his peculiar treasure. Doesn't that make you want to be what he chose you to be? Three, he chose us, heck, out of!

Why did he choose you and pass by so many? Doesn't that make you want to be what he chose you to be? Doesn't it? Did you ever hear of that famous Congregationalist preacher, the late Dr. Joseph Parker of the City Temple, one of the greatest pulpiteers England ever had? On one occasion, a sarcastic wag accosted Dr. Parker and sneeringly asked, Dr. Parker, if Jesus Christ knew everything as you preach he did, tell me this, why did Jesus Christ choose Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him? And Parker pondered, and then with deep emotion he replied, why did Jesus choose Judas? Hey, man, I've a bigger question than that. Why did Jesus choose me? Have you never asked yourself that? Why did he set his love and his choice on me? Well, this text tells you.

And that brings me to the second part of my address. Am I keeping you too long? I didn't think I was. But now, that's it.

This is why he chose us, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Well now, says somebody, I'm following, but the thing that puzzles me, Mr. Preacher, is what is this holiness? And how do I come into the experiencing of it? Well, look at the verse again, will you? Get ready, I'm going to ask you a question. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, what's the next word? No, it isn't.

I knew you'd miss it. What's the next word after holy? Yes, and. I know what's going on in your minds.

You've been thinking, well, there can't be any special meaning in that little copula, and. But there is here. Now, the Greek conjunction that we hear translate by our connective word and is chi, in English lettering, K-A-I.

And of course, its usual meaning is and. But over and over and over again, it has a divisive sense corresponding to our little word but. Nor is that all over and over again, it has the sense of.

That is or even or which equals. Now, I'm not making an argument of this, I'm only pointing it out for the more rapid elucidation of the meaning here. You can read it like this.

That we should be holy, that is or which equals or even without fault. No, it doesn't say without fault. It says without blame.

Now, I want this to get clearly into everybody's mind, unless it's there clearly already. The holiness to which God calls you and me at present is not faultlessness, but it is blamelessness. Now, be patient.

I can see somebody's asking already. Well, tell us what's the difference between faultlessness and blamelessness. All right, don't be excited and don't be impatient.

I'll tell you. You see, faultlessness has to do with our faculties. Blamelessness has to do with our motives.

Shall I say that again? Faultlessness has to do with our natural powers or faculties, whereas blamelessness exclusively refers to our motives. Now, in this present life and in this mortal body, you and I will never have faultlessness, whether spiritually, mentally, morally, or physically. But although we cannot have faultlessness, we can have blamelessness.

I think I ought just to elucidate that a little more, don't you? You see, some of the holiest men I have ever known have been afflicted with awfully bad memories. And some of the most choicely sanctified Christian sisters it has ever been my privilege to meet, as to their faculty of natural judgment have been not only

fallible, but disappointingly gullible. But may I remind you that a bad memory is not a sin.

It is a social pest. And that feminine gullibility to which I have just referred is not a sin. It is a feminine catastrophe.

Now, I'm making the point that mistakes are not necessarily sins. Now, all sins are mistakes, but not all mistakes are sins. And you and I can have many faults about our natural faculties, but we may have a clean heart.

My precious wife and I, both of us, were brought up in the little town of Ashton-on-the-Lyne, six miles from Manchester, and at the foot of the Pennine Hills. And I'm thinking just now of a dear little Lancashire lassie, oh, years ago now, and one cold wintry night when her mother had gone out on some messages, when she was going out on some messages, the dear little damsel took her mother's shoes and put them in the oven to warm. It was in the days, you know, when Lancashire cottages in the living room had an open fireplace with an oven on one side for baking bread and cooking meals.

Do you still have them? Well, you are behind the times. Anyway, this dear little girl, she put her mother's shoes in the oven to warm, and by the time her mother needed them, they were roasted beyond repair. And since they were in pecuniary straits, it was indeed a major disaster.

But did that mother say to that little girl, oh, you little wretch, I'll give you the best thrashing you've ever had? Oh, no, no, no, how could she? The dear little girl had made a costly mistake, but had she committed a sin? No, the motive was love. Are you following? Now, you know, one of the tricks of Satan is to tell Christians that when they make mistakes, they've committed sins. Don't listen to him.

He'll bring you into bondage by any trick that he can think of. And don't let him persuade you that mistakes are sins. No, no, they're not.

And I want to make it as clear as I can in this meeting. The Lord isn't calling us to faultlessness. He's calling us to blamelessness.

Now, that leads to this. When all the motives of my heart and mind are straight and clean and pure toward God, toward myself, and toward my fellow human beings, when all my motives are truly sincere, that is blamelessness. Now, I'm anticipating you again.

There's somebody here saying, oh, Dr. Baxter, you've lifted me sky-high. Now you've let me down in a basket. You see, Mr. Preacher, I could never have a mind like that.

Mr. Preacher, if you knew what a bag of inherited weaknesses I am, if you knew what a cage of unclean birds my mind often seems, if you knew what a pestilential swamp of ungovernable passions my heart sometimes seems to be, you'd know I'm such an hereditary self-contradiction, I could never have a heart and a mind as clean and pure as that. Well, you're wrong. Oh, hallelujah, you're wrong.

Because we haven't quite finished with the text. Now look at the climax of it. That we should be holy, that is, without blame before God, in love.

And what does that mean? It means this. You and I, oh, how dare I say this, it's almost too glorious to announce, but it's biblical. You and I may be filled with the love of our Heavenly Father.

Our minds and hearts may be filled and flooded with the love of Jesus. Our hearts and minds may be continually filled and flooded with the life and the light and the love of the Holy Spirit. In a word, the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit may be really in you and me.

I sometimes think that's the most amazing truth in the Bible. Not only the love of God for us, but the love of God in us, and then the love of God through us. And my dear friends, that is the secret of holiness.

Now, as I draw to an end, at least an end of my address, I want to ask you. Oh, the other will come by and by. And very gravely so.

I beg your pardon. Come back. Brothers and sisters, I want to ask you, are you living in the experience of that indwelling, infilling love of God? We are not preaching theory tonight.

We are not just expressing what may be called wishful thinking. We are at the moment encountering the most amazing truth in the New Testament. The love of God is seeking to possess and monopolize and fill you and me.

And when we become unobstructedly possessed by Him, that in flooding love of God, it begins at once to cleanse our motives, to refine our tastes, to purify our predispositions, to renew even our native impulses, so that instead of struggling, struggling, striving to be holy, it becomes a delightful experience of spontaneity. The love of God begins to sanctify and renew and transform us in the very basis of our personality. Look, speaking metaphorically, sin has made holes in our nature.

And many of us have bad memories and poor judgment and all sorts of other disabilities of our Adamic, fallen nature. And they'll cling and clog around us until the trumpet sounds and this mortal puts on immortality. But what I'm preaching is that those natural imperfections do not preclude the cloth being washed white.

Did you get it? Well now, our blessed, dear and precious Savior, He's here in this filey meeting. And not only can His wonderful blood wash out every black stain of guilt, but His inflooding love can fill you and me and begin to renew and refine and sanctify us within. But He must get us.

It always comes to this, and with this I close. One, what I give to Him, He takes. Two, what He takes, He cleanses.

Three, what He cleanses, He fills. And four, what He fills, He uses. Now I'm asking you, if you have not reached the post-conversion crisis in which you yield your already redeemed soul and body and mind and brain, if you have not come to that point of an unemotional, careful thinking, entire yielding to Christ, will you do that tonight? I'm not going to press and urge you, because if you don't love Jesus dearly enough or deeply enough, you'll not do it.

But, forgive the colloquialism, if your head in love with God's dear Son, if your head over heels in love with Him, you'll give Him everything. Will you do that? Don't you think this should be our prayer? Break through my nature, mighty heavenly love. Clear every avenue of thought and brain.

Flood my affections, purify my will, let nothing but thine own pure life remain. Thus wholly mastered and possessed by thee, forth from my life, spontaneous and free, shall flow a stream of grace and tenderness, loving because thy love lives through me.

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