

Pastor Paul Bawden
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"God – In Control"
Ephesians 1:1-14

When I think back on my childhood, there is not a time that I remember when the biblical God wasn't talked about and the Bible read. My sister and I went to Sunday School and Church regularly. Since our father was a pastor for a number of years, being in church was just the place to be. In the evenings in our home as we got older we had family devotions together, where we would read a chapter and each of us would take turns reading a verse. Then we would each pray for different needs. It was after devotions one evening at the age of seven, we started talking about Jesus Christ and what he had done for us. My sister had accepted the Lord earlier at a Paul Levin and Bob Finley Tent meeting, but in the process of talking about Christ, my Dad asked me if I had accepted Christ as personal Savior. Of course I hadn't, and it was there that I prayed to receive Christ as my personal Savior.

Ever since that time the Lord has been in my life, leading and guiding me. He has been my Friend and Shepherd.

If you know Christ as your Savior today, I'm sure that you can also look back to that time when you accepted Christ as your personal Savior. Perhaps you grew up in a biblical Christian home where God was honored and you were involved in church and Sunday School. If you didn't grow up in a Christian home, and accepted the Lord later, you can still share your story of God's leading and guiding in your life. The Lord is your Friend and Shepherd as well.

But as I grew in my knowledge of God and His Word, I began to be exposed to the teaching in the Bible about God that He was sovereign, that is, He was in control of all things, yes, He had the final say. He was the potter and I was the clay.

I remember later in life, as I attended seminary, I would come home in the summers. During that time, I would have conversations with my Dad about the sovereignty of God. Does this mean that we humans are robots, just programmed by God to act a certain way? Did God set up the fall in the Garden of Eden? Do we really have free will? How is the sovereignty of God and man's free will reconciled, or is it impossible to do so. What does it mean that God is sovereign for the follower of Jesus Christ? I remember one of his answers was, which he said came from one of his professors at the Moody Bible Institute, that both the sovereignty of God and man's free will are taught in the Bible and they meet beyond the sky.

As we continue this series on "The Kind Of God To Believe In," considering the attributes or characteristics of God, I would like to dig a little more today into this attribute of God called His sovereignty, that He is in control.

Our text in Ephesians has this to say.

Ephesians 1:5 – "according to His kind intention of His will"

Ephesians 1:9 – "according to His kind intention (His pleasure) which He purposed in Him"

Ephesians 1:11b - "according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will."

Obviously these verses are telling us that God is sovereignly working out His plan for people and the world.

When we consider the sovereignty of God we first must mention . . .

I. Some assumptions.

Since God is working out, with His kind intention, all things after the counsel of His will, He has to be the personal eternal, infinite omnipresent, unchanging God, who is the Creator, having all power.

That's why we have considered these attributes of the biblical God:

- 1. Personal – He is Spirit.**
- 2. Eternal**

3. Infinite**4. Omnipresent****5. Unchanging – immutable – God.**

These characteristics of the biblical God we have already considered.

To be sovereign, the biblical God would also have the ability to know all things actual and possible, while having all power, able to be the Creator. We'll look at these attributes of God at another time.

For the biblical God, then, to be Sovereign, He must have these characteristics, which He does.

What should be our response to our Sovereign God?

II. Praise is given to the Sovereign God for who He is (Ephesians 1:3).

He is God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This refers to their eternal relationship as Father, and Son, Jesus Christ.

1. God the Father is the Source of God's blessings.

He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (heavenly places).

Praise can only be given to God because He is the source of every spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. The biblical God is the source of these eternal blessings.

2. Jesus Christ is the channel of God's blessings.

Blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places IN CHRIST.

Christ is the channel through which God blesses the believer in Christ.

Note the words Him (referring to Christ), Jesus Christ and Christ.

Verse 4 – twice (Him)

Verse 5 – Jesus Christ

Verse 7 - Him

Verse 9 – Him

Verse 10 – Christ, Him

Verse 12 – Christ

Whatever God the heavenly Father does for us is challenged through His Son, for it's through His Son that God accomplishes our eternal redemption and His plan for the world.

III. Praise is given to the Sovereign God for what He has done in the past (Ephesians 1:4-6).**1. God made a choice (an election - once for all, in and of Himself) - deals with people (Eph. 4:4).**

(1) God made a choice before the foundation of the world – before creation.

(2) God made a choice of us (believers), not based upon any merit of their own.

Some feel this is individual. Others believe that this is corporate – God chose the church, the body of Christ. It seems to me to more individual.

(3) God made the choice of us IN CHRIST.

(4) God made that choice with a purpose – Believers would be holy (set apart to Him, and blameless, so that no charge could be brought against them).

2. God marked out beforehand (predestined – this is the means by which the election was carried out) so there would be those who would believe in Christ (Eph. 4:5).

God took this action, the means, so that believers in Christ would be His adopted sons, that is set apart as having a mature position in Christ, as the very sons of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

Let's note some specific teachings here about God's sovereignty.

1. God's attitude in His sovereignty displayed to mankind in salvation.

(1) God's sovereignty is carried out in love (1:4).

This is agape love – Calvary love – unconditional love, love that sacrifices for sinners, paying the price of their redemption.

(2) God's sovereignty is wrapped in God's grace – His unmerited favor to those who believe in Christ

(3) God's sovereignty has a purpose –

That believers would be holy, blameless and sons of God by adoption.

God is not like a bull in a china closet causing all kinds of destruction. Rather, the Sovereign God always acts in love and grace with His justice in dealing with people with an ultimate eternal purpose, that they be part of His eternal family forever.

2. God's reason for acting sovereignly in salvation for mankind.

The actual reason is not displayed directly in the text, although it is implied when the text reads that God has made the choice for some to be holy, blameless, and sons of God. If that is true, then, obviously people were not at one time holy, blameless, and sons of God. They were sinners, under God's judgment. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2 – they are dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Romans 3 adds that there is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. . . (Romans 3:10-11).

If God had not made a choice to save individuals, there would be no salvation. Yes, this choice was made before the foundation of the world, which meant that God knew what would happen to Adam and Eve before He created them, but in the Godhead there was this choice and marking out beforehand by God in order to cement the eternal reality that out of the man's depravity, his sin, some would be have forgiveness and eternal life. If God had not made this choice, no one would be able to receive Christ as personal Savior. There would be no salvation. That's why Luke 10:19 records the words of Christ, "For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which is lost."

3. God in His choice includes man's belief in the salvation He provides in Christ.

God's election includes, God's choice, the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, no one can come to God unless He draw him, taught our Lord (John 6:65). It also includes the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or sharing the gospel message, so that a person can see his need of the Savior Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It also includes many times, prayer for an individual to come to know Christ. Then salvation includes the faith of the individual to accept Christ as personal Savior – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31).

As the Spirit of God moves on the heart of the individual to bring conviction, that person is somehow illumined to see that he or she needs to accept Christ as Savior, and makes that decision for Christ. Regardless, the individual is involved in that decision to accept Christ.

Such is not the easiest to understand that God made a choice in eternity past for those who would come to know Christ personally, yet the individual is given the choice to make a decision for Jesus Christ.

Obviously, God's election, and man's responsibility and ability to make a choice for the Lord are both taught in the Scripture. This tension with these opposites is called an antimony - Something that can not be reconciled, yet both are biblically true. That's why I mentioned earlier that my Dad had said that his professor at Moody many years ago said that the sovereignty of God and man's free will are both taught in Scripture and they meet beyond the sky.

This antimony has been explained this way.

Someone has said that there is a gate with the words on it that **"Whosoever will may come in."** or "Believe on Jesus Christ as personal Savior". When the person hears those words, and the Spirit convicts him or her of their need, they come in, having accepted Christ as personal Savior. Inside the believer turns around and looks at the other side of the gate, there is a sign which says, **"Chosen In Christ Before The Foundation Of The World."**

Does this mean that those who don't believe in Christ have been predestined to eternal separation from God. Some like to think that, but it is difficult to find that in the Bible, from my vantage point. Those who reject Christ will not be able to say to

the Lord that you didn't choose me. They made their choice not to accept Christ as Savior.

The emphasis on the Scripture is God's choice of people to eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, rather than being sent to eternal damnation in the lake of fire. Yes, those who reject Christ will go there, but they send themselves there by rejecting Christ, not by God sending them there.

That's why God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). Why also that Christ said that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. God so loved the world. God is in the business of wanting to see people come to know Him as personal Savior.

4. The response made to God knowing that He has made a sovereign choice for individuals to come to know Christ (Ephesians 1:6).

The sovereignty of God in making a choice that individuals can come to know Christ personally **should cause us to rejoice in the Lord and praise His Name.**

What does Ephesians 1:6 say? "To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." That is in Jesus Christ.

God can only be praised for His selection of all believers in Him. It's only because of His love and grace.

IV. Praise is given to the Sovereign God for what He does in the present (Ephesians 1:7-9, 13-14).

1. For redemption (Eph. 1:7-8).

God gave His Son, Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our breaking God's law which is death, by giving His own life for us on the cross. Then He was buried and conquered the grave the third day telling us that His redemption for us was eternally complete.

The word, redemption, here is the most emphatic in the original language. It means that the believer is purchased out of the slave market of sin, is secure in Christ, with freedom, yes, complete freedom to live for God doing His will for His glory. The believer will never have to back into the slave market of sin again.

Redemption is the root of everything else that God does for the believer in Jesus Christ.

(1) Redemption's basis.

God's redemption is based upon Christ giving His life-blood, the eternal price, that was paid to God for our redemption. The wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission, for the life is in the blood. The blood sacrifice of the eternal Christ paid the eternal price for God's redemption for us.

(2) Redemption's results.

Forgiveness of our trespasses – our transgressions, our faults – that which is against God.

The believer's sins against God are taken away. As far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us. **Every sin the believer has committed is committing and will commit are forgiven for the believer in Jesus Christ.**

God's redemption for us in Christ is truly amazing. Forgiveness of all of our sins against God and the basis to forgive others because Christ has forgiven us.

(4) Redemption's unmerited favor.

Redemption is through Christ's blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses is according to the riches, God's unlimited, grace – His unmerited favor to us. God gives us what we don't deserve as sinners – His unlimited grace. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, and now am found, was blind but now I see.

Such grace is lavished upon the believer in Christ. God holds nothing back when He gives His grace to the believer in Jesus Christ. He did it with all wisdom and insight, meaning God knew what he was getting into when we accepted Him as personal Savior. But He lavished His grace – in abundance, yes, superabundance,

Praise to God is also given for the privilege to be part of the body of Christ.

2. For being part of the body of Christ (Eph. 1:9).

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him.”

What is the mystery of God’s will? May I refer you to Ephesians 3:3, where Paul writes about mystery, which he explains as the Jew and Gentile in one body, the church. This relationship was not known in the Old Testament, but now is made known, because of the death, burial, and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God’s amazing redemption is available to both Jew and Gentile through faith in Jesus Christ. Those trusting in Christ are put into that new relationship with Christ, of being together in the body of Christ to enjoy fellowship with the Lord and with each other, while serving Him together to the glory of God.

Then there is praise to the sovereign God in the present

3. For being sealed by God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14).

At the time of believing in Christ, the believer is sealed by the Holy Spirit, which guarantees the believer’s eternal redemption.

The Holy Spirit is the seal, the pledge, the down payment, on the believer’s life that he or she will one day be in God’s presence for ever.

What a statement of the believer’s eternal security in Christ. This sealing is done by God. The believer can not unseal the redemption God has given him. God is the sealer. God will finish what He has started in the believer’s life, and God guarantees the believer will arrive in His presence. God has His stamp on the believer, and no one can open the “letter,” until it arrives in God’s presence, when it is opened by God Himself. God is the sealer, the sender, and the receiver of the believer in Christ.

What security the believer has in Jesus Christ. Yes what a privilege to be God’s possession not just for time but for all eternity. The believer has been bought with a price, the precious spotless Lamb of God who gave His life-blood for him.

Again Paul can only give praise to God, as he pens, “to the praise of His glory.”

Please notice that the Trinity is involved in God’s sovereignty in this passage of Ephesians 1:3-14. God selects us. The Son saves us, and the Holy Spirit seals us, guaranteeing our arrival in God’s presence to be with Him forever.

There is one more area in this section regarding God’s sovereignty. Paul has written about the past and the present. He also talks about the future.

V. Praise is given to the Sovereign God for what He will yet do in the future (Ephesians 1:10- 12).

In these verses Paul writes about the administration, the plan, the arrangement that will come in the fullness of time, when God sums up everything in Christ, things in heaven and things in earth.

What is God directing Paul to write about here?

This could refer to that millennial time when Christ will come and rule on earth and there will be harmony among all believers who are present there and with creation itself. Then the completion of history comes, and as it says in I Corinthians 15:25ff, (Also Revelation 20).

"For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet, But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subject to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all." (15:25-28).

The believer will also receive His inheritance, or be made Christ's inheritance when Christ returns. He is certainly the believer's hope (1:12).

In spite of man's rebellion and sin against God, God is sovereignly working out His plan for the world, and for all believers in Him.

What a relief that should be for us as we see our government going deeper and deeper into debt, and our leaders not seeming to recognize what that will do to our country's ability to survive economically. It seems from a human stand point that our country is on a collision course if we don't take drastic measures to make some drastic change.

Regardless, our God, the biblical God, is sovereignly working out His plan. We can trust Him, for He is in control. At the right moment, He will intervene, and bring His sovereignty to bear on the situation.

V. God's sovereignty applied to our personal lives.

1. God deserves our worship.

He is our Sovereign God in control of all things who has provided us redemption through faith in Jesus Christ. We can only bless His name and give Him praise, as Paul does in this Ephesians' passage (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

2. God desires that we live holy lives.

Lives that demonstrate that we are His possession. The believer is sanctified, set apart to God at the time of salvation. But the believer is practically sanctified each day as he yields to the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. God wants us to be holy, like Him.

3. God desires that we act as mature sons and daughters of His.

Lives that portray the attitudes and actions of Jesus Christ.

If God did not bless, not one hair, not a solitary wisp of straw, would grow; but there would be an end of everything. At the same time, God wants me to take this stance: I would have nothing whatever if I did not plow and sow. God does not want to have success come without work, and yet I am not to achieve it by my work. He does not want me to sit at home, to loaf, to commit matters to God, and to wait till a fried chicken flies into my mouth. That would be tempting God. (Martin Luther)

Yes, God holds us responsible for our actions. The believer is to work for the Lord in His power within His sovereignty.

4. God wants our lives to have stability.

In spite of what is happening to us, in the good and the challenging, we know that God is in control working out His will for us for our good and His glory.

I remember Corrie Ten Boom talking about the fleas when she and her sister, Betsy, were in the German concentration camp. The place where they slept was full of fleas. The fleas kept the guards from coming into their barracks. As a result they could have a time for prayer and talking about God's Word. Thusly, Corrie thanked God for the fleas. The negative gave their lives God's stability in the midst of their persecution. Only the sovereign biblical God could do that.

What are the fleas in our lives that the sovereign God wants to use for us for our good and His glory?

5. God wants us to have His perspective on the world in which we live.

God will bring to conclusion His plan for the world in His time. Tozer makes this comment about the sovereignty of God.

An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history."

God is working out all things after the counsel of His will. If that were not true, the world would be on a collision course.

6. God wants us to live with confidence in Him.

Paul said that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. We keep looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith.

7. God wants us to live with hope in Him.

We have a living hope in Jesus Christ. In the tough times, hope does not disappoint. We keep looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

May our knowing personally the sovereign God through faith in Jesus Christ, cause us to serve our Lord with confident enthusiasm this week for His glory!!