

Convent Avenue Baptist Church
Wednesday Bible Study 4/14/10
Pastor Jesse Williams

The Articles of Faith; What we believe...

Article IX. God's Purpose of Grace

Romans 8:26-34, 1 Peter 2:1-10, Ephesians 1:3-14

The words “*chosen*”, “*predestination*” and “*elect*” are words that have been a source of much misunderstanding and debate in the Christian church for centuries. All of these words on the surface have the implication that human beings have a predetermined destiny or future that will definitely happen regardless of what they may say or do, or how they may live. In our society we say that it is “fate”, “karma”, “destiny” or that something is “just meant to be”. Whatever the case, we have to be careful about applying a “whatever will be, will be” mentality to our lives indiscriminately, especially when it comes to our faith.

This doctrinal teaching of the church challenges us to think about God's eternal redemptive purpose for all of humanity and creation; and how they are founded upon love and made possible by grace. When we say “grace”, we are referring to God's unmerited favor that He bestows upon us. There is nothing that we do to earn favor from the heart of God, instead God chooses to love us, save us and redeem us out of God's own heart and character. God chose to send Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ chose to die on the cross. God chose to put the plan of salvation into action for us. God chose us, and as the bible teaches us it is our choice to love God back and to choose to live for Him.

Unfortunately, throughout world history this doctrine has been misused, misapplied and abused by groups of people who have claimed to be God's “chosen people” and have therefore used it to justify their own opinions and actions that are inconsistent with the nature and character of God. Hate groups, terrorist groups and politically and socially oppressive groups and even nations have been and still do use God's name and purpose to justify ungodly stances and actions in the world because they believe they have been “chosen” by God to do so.

But this doctrinal teaching exposes the faulty nature of all of them by telling us that God extends love, grace and salvation to ALL people without prejudice or exclusion; and that ALL people have the free will to accept or reject God's invitation to salvation. Our choices as human beings do matter, and they have consequences. God has so created us and this world such that our choices in life can create all different types of consequences and can affect our future and destiny. God is a God of love, and humanity is created to be morally responsible and accountable. The issues of election, predestination and being chosen must properly be understood in the biblical context of being “*in Christ*”. When it comes to this article of faith, we must remember the following;

1) God is sovereign, and has self-imposed limitations

We know and believe that God is all-powerful and can do anything that God wants to. But God also is faithful and keeps His word, so God will not act contrary to His word, His purpose or His nature. God does not have to ask anyone's permission to act, but He always acts in accordance with His own laws and nature. God always works within the boundaries of love and righteousness which God Himself created. So, since God created us with a free will, He would

never impose or force us to love Him or anyone else. It is a choice that we must make. God has the power to force us or make us to love Himself and everyone else, but that would be contrary to God's nature and His word. His grace comes to us in the form of an invitation, and even though He has the power to force it on us, God would not do that because it is contrary to His promise.

2) Humanity has a free will that makes us morally responsible and accountable

God created us with the ability to choose, therefore we are responsible for our choices and the consequences that come from them. We cannot make choices and then blame God for the results; especially if we choose to do something that is outside of God's biblical standards of righteousness. Likewise, if things go well in our lives we should not steal the credit for it as if God has not blessed us. God gave us free will so that we can respond willingly to God's invitation to be in a loving, saving relationship with Him. If we reject God, there are consequences that we must face. It is not God's desire for anyone to perish, but God knows that if we have free will, then some may choose to reject Him. God does not play favorites with people in creation. While some may have a different purpose, position or place in life; God's overall desire remains consistent throughout time. God wants all people to be saved and blessed and invites us to be with Him.

3) We are "elect", "chosen" and "predestined" in Christ

The key to understanding what being chosen really means lies in understanding what it means to be in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Notice how many times the bible talks about being "in Christ" or its equivalent in Ephesians 1. When we are "in Christ" it is then that we are blessed to be included in those who have a predetermined destiny, who are chosen as a peculiar people, and are a part of God's elect body of believers who are in fellowship with Him. Being "in Christ" is what determines our destiny and gives us assurance and confidence that we are safely and securely in the hands of God. Our purpose and our future are already set and defined because we are "in Christ". Not limited to the earthly, temporary existence in this world, but being "in Christ" gives us an eternal destiny that far surpasses anything that this world may offer. God's love causes God to extend His grace to us in the form of an invitation to new life and relationship with Him. When we use our free will to choose Jesus Christ, then we are blessed to be born into the body of Christ, the elect, the chosen, the predestined from the foundation of the world.