

**John 17:6-16**<sup>NRS</sup> <sup>6</sup> "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup> for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. <sup>12</sup> While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. <sup>13</sup> But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. <sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. <sup>15</sup> I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

**Romans 2:1-16**<sup>NRS</sup> Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. <sup>2</sup> You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." <sup>3</sup> Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup> Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? <sup>5</sup> But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> For he will repay according to each one's deeds: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. <sup>9</sup> There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, <sup>10</sup> but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. <sup>11</sup> For God shows no partiality. <sup>12</sup> All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup> For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. <sup>15</sup> They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup> on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

## “What about the Unchosen”

Like many people my age in North America, I grew up enculturated in the Christian faith. In church and in school I was taught Christian things mainly that God/Jesus loves us and therefore we should be good people. Somewhere along the way I began to hear that this God who loved us was also angry with us because of sin and he was going to judge us after we die and our souls go on to the afterlife. If we hadn't confessed our sin, professed faith in Jesus as Saviour and lived a good life then God, the Judge, was going to send us to Hell instead of let us into Heaven for eternity.

Growing up in that belief structure when I heard the word "Gospel" I thought it meant that because God loved us, he had provided a way for us to escape eternity in Hell. He sent His Son, Jesus, to take the penalty of our sin upon himself by dying for us, the righteous for the unrighteous. All a person had to do to get saved was profess faith in Jesus and his saving death and follow him. Salvation simply meant saved from spending eternity in Hell.

I call that truncated gospel, the Pop-Christian Myth. It is not what the Bible presents as the gospel. The Myth developed in the Middle Ages to keep Christendom in power over Western culture. Its reign lasted until roughly 1965 when church membership began to drastically decline and has done so ever since. The Myth gives no mention of the

presence of Jesus Christ with us in the Holy Spirit, New Life, Resurrection, the Kingdom of God, and New Creation. Salvation is our rescue from Sin and Death both ultimately when Christ returns at the Resurrection and presently in new life in Christ by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit and faith-filled living. Moreover, one cannot by means of a decision of one's free will choose to be saved for the will is not free. It's fallen.

The Myth's emphasis on our decision getting us saved developed around an errant understanding of a doctrine called Prevenient Grace in the 1,700's within the Wesleyan Tradition that gave birth to Revivalism. Prevenient means preventing. Preventing grace means that by his grace God prevents us in our sin from flat out destroying everything. The error comes in when they say part of this preventing grace is that God has fixed the human will just enough that we may be able to choose faith in Christ and therein put into effect our own salvation. There is no Scriptural basis for that teaching. It is only a deduction from doctrine.

For me, the Myth got busted as soon as I heard the call to ministry and actually began to read the Bible and to study it in university and seminary. Oddly, the very first experience I ever had of God speaking to me from Scripture was one morning while reading the Gospel of John where Jesus says to his disciples at 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last." That word meant a lot to me because at the time, I was feeling a lot of rejection – I'd been dumped yet again and my family thought I had gone off the deep end with Jesus. Well, that verse has proven to stick with me over the years and come to find out; it is one of the cornerstone verses of what our theological tradition, the Reformed Tradition, calls the Doctrine of Election. Forgive me for taking this moment to explain it to you.

Over the years Presbyterians have affectionately referred to ourselves as "The Frozen Chosen" because we say that according to Scripture, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, God chooses individuals or peoples to be the objects of his grace so that they might fulfill his purposes. Most often God's election is unfortunately associated with his choice of individuals unto salvation. Some Scriptures to support Election; Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6)" and "No one can (no one is able to) come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn. 6:44). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-30 that God has chosen the foolish and weak things implying the Corinthian Christians to shame the wise and foolish. He finishes off the section in verse 30 saying, "by his doing you are in Christ." – his, God's doing, not their own. God chooses us. Because of sin we are simply unable to choose to have faith in Jesus Christ for our own salvation. God chooses those whom he will save and the fact that he does even that is the proof of his righteousness.

To make the point a little more, in Romans 3:10-18 Paul quotes a number of Old Testament passages to say that no one is righteous; no one with understanding of God; no one who seeks God. Victor Shepherd would say our natural state because of sin is fleeing from God not seeking God. Even when people give the impression that they are simply seeking God, they are really just fleeing from him and will only find a more fit means for the themselves to continue to keep God at arms length. If God has not chosen to reveal himself to us in, through, and as Jesus Christ by the revealing work of the Holy Spirit any search for God we may conduct is nothing but an intense sprint to get away from the one true God to find a god that meets our standards.

The pop singer Madonna is an example. I read an interview of her a few weeks back where she answered the question of why she had become a practitioner of Jewish mysticism otherwise known a Kabbalah. She was raised Roman Catholic, yet she said that after reading a bunch of stuff she found that the "philosophy" undergirding Kabbalah clicked with her and her values and was what she was searching for. So, she decided to start practicing it. She was searching for "God" and walked away totally in control of her own religion which boils down to, in her words, "philosophy". The Jews, as chosen people, also don't appreciate her decision.

When talking about Election, obviously who is saved and who is not is the vexing question. I can say that God in his wisdom and mercy has chosen to save me, but...what happens when life plays out and it looks as if God has not chosen to save William and Alice!! I was recently asked that question and my Sunday morning off-the-cuff response was, "They've been baptized." Well, we still have to baptize Alice. I stand by that answer. We don't have the time this morning for me to lay out a full teaching regarding Baptism. But, as I have said before when a believing church baptizes a child from a believing household we do not do so in the hope that that child will grow up and become a Christian. We are in fact claiming that child for Christ and thereby making her a Christian. Whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven as Jesus told his disciples (Matt. 16:19).

Another thing to ponder is whether or not God really answers our prayers. We all have friends, close family members, children that we wish knew the Lord and it does grieve us deeply that apparently God has not chosen them to receive his grace as we have. But, is the salvation of those closest to us something that is off limits for us to pray for? Will God disregard our prayers simply because who is and who isn't saved is his department? I don't think so. I think it is entirely possible that in the end God will save some "poor reprobates" because one of his beloved chosen has asked him to. Wasn't it Jesus who said, "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:9-11) Moreover, John 17 indicates that we, the chosen, have Jesus praying for us and with us and through us. Romans 8 says we got the Holy Spirit in us praying the will of God. Our burdens for our loved ones are their burdens too. Our prayers in this regard are their prayers too. Need we worry about the salvation of those we love? It's better we pray.

The problem with the Doctrine of Election is that we over emphasize it's connection to salvation to the exclusion that the emphasis the Bible places on it has more to do with our being chosen for God's purposes in the preset, God's purpose for us of doing New Creation work now in preparation of the day when all things will be made new and everyone will be raised from the dead and judged. Moreover, God judges with righteousness (Ps. 9:8). When God judges the outcome is salvation!!! When God pours out his wrath upon the wicked it is to save them!!! God's wrath is that the consequence of sin is having to live with the consequences of sin. Eventually God's kindness leads us to repentance. That's Roman's 1 and 2 in a nutshell. Speaking for myself, if we are judged solely on works then I am just as wicked now as I was twenty years ago. I have not cleaned up my act really at all. The only real difference is that I know the Lord and I know he knows me and he has healed me of some deep pains and in so doing changed my heart to be more compassionate and less judging.

Since we are the chosen, our purpose as the church is kingdom building, building for the new creation now, working for the salvation, the deliverance and healing, of his Creation now for these things will endure. Paul, after giving a very lengthy defense of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, says, "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (v. 58). The Kingdom building God has for us to do now will endure to the day when all things are made new and Sin and Death are no more. We, the chosen, are the present proof of God's righteousness. God's righteousness is that his final answer, his final judgment with respect to our Fallenness and the corruption of his good Creation because of us is to redeem his creation through Jesus Christ and make all things new. Let your life be a living proclamation of God's righteousness. Amen.