

150. The Gospel of John—15:14-16

“Chosen by God” Part 1
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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As we have said numerous times in our study of John’s Gospel—Chapters 13 through 16 constitute Jesus’ final words to His disciples before His crucifixion. In that regard, the Lord is touching on the most important things He shared with them over the course of His 3-½ ministry—a kind of ‘highlights’ reel if you will.

In many ways these verses this morning capture that idea and summarize some of the most important teachings Jesus wanted to share with His men before the cross.

I. **The Friends of God**—verses 14-15

John 15:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

When Jesus called His disciples His *‘friends’*—“if you do whatever I command you”—understand this wasn’t a *conditional* statement based on our obedience to Him. In other words, Jesus isn’t saying that we are His friends—only *if* we obey what He has commanded us to do.

He is using **friends** as a *synonym* for genuine born-again believers in Him.

In other words, those who are truly saved (in contrast with Judas) are the *friends* of Jesus who demonstrate the genuineness of their faith by *obeying* Him—“[My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.](#)” (John 10:27)

The only other person in the Bible who was called the *‘friend of God’* was Abraham—who believed God and was saved—

James 2:23 (NKJV)

²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” And he was called the friend of God.

Look, it’s one thing to call someone important *your* friend—people may or may not believe you. But when someone important calls you *their* friend—it’s really something special!

➤ **How does it feel to have the Creator of the universe call you a close personal friend?**

➤ **How does it make you feel that out of the entire human race Jesus chose *you* to be one of His friends?**

Sometimes earthly friends can be fickle, disloyal—and even turn against you and betray you (as Judas did to Jesus).

BUT JESUS

- He is a friend who will never leave you, forsake you or turn against you!
- He is a Friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)
- He is a Friend Who has proven His love for you by the supreme test of dying for you—

John 15:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**

Remember, before we got saved and were called the ‘friends of God’—we were called the ‘*enemies of God*’:

Romans 5:8, 10 (NKJV)

⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...¹⁰ For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

If God loved us while we were His enemies, and Jesus died for us—how much more does God love us now that we are His ‘friends’?

Now you might be thinking:

- “*Wait, I thought I was a child of God?*”—You are.
- “*I thought I was a servant of God?*”—You are.
- “*I’m uncomfortable calling God my friend because it seems to put me on His level—like an ‘equal’.*”

First of all, understand that when God (in this case Jesus) calls you His *friend* He isn’t saying that you’re His ‘*buddy*’—like when one of *your* friends or buddies shows up at your door and you invite them in to have a beer and watch the game with you.

Jesus isn’t *that* kind of friend—***He is NOT your “buddy” or “homeboy” or your “bro” as some have called Him.***

The idea of being a friend of God doesn’t negate our reverence for Him, our worship of Him, or our subservience to Him as our God! It’s just Jesus’ way of saying that His disciples have entered into a brand-new relationship with Him under the New Covenant than Israel had with God under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant.

In that culture no master would die for one of his slaves—nor would he tell his slaves what he was doing—it was none of their business!

Even though we *are* called Jesus’ *slaves* (*doulos*) in the New Testament—our overall relationship with Him is much more intimate than that of a slave to his master back then.

There is a unity and oneness that we have with Him that transcends all other human relationships—something Jesus stressed with the concept of *abiding* in Him earlier in this Chapter and now stresses once again with the idea that we are His *friends*.

That’s why Jesus told His disciples that **their relationship with Him was much more intimate** than that of a master to his slaves—again, no master in that culture would die for one of his slaves. Yet, not only did Jesus die for us—He shared His heart, His will, and His mission with us—we call it the ‘Great Commission’:

REFLECTION: Define what it means to have a close personal relationship with Jesus. Why would it be inappropriate to define this close relationship as a “bro”, “buddy” or “homeboy”?

Matthew 28:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Understand, our relationship with Him is based on and made possible through our *faith*—but our intimacy with Him (practical, daily fellowship) is predicated upon our ongoing *obedience* to all He has commanded us as His people.

Jesus is telling His disciples that our *friendship* with Him is a *positional* truth—with *practical* implications. Understand, our relationship with Jesus as His friends started long before we were ever born—in fact it was sealed before time began—

Titus 1:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Paul, a bondservant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect [chosen ones] and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ² in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began [a physical dimension associated with the physical creation]...

The fact that we as believers are the ‘friends of God’ is based on our second point:

II. The Foreknowledge of God—verse 16

John 15:16a (NKJV)

¹⁶ **You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that your fruit should remain.***

All fruit bearing in the Christian life started long before we got saved or were even born—with God choosing us.

**I’d like to take the rest of our time this morning to camp on Jesus’ statement:
“You did not choose Me, but I chose you...”**

Upon saying this, I think Jesus’ disciples must have looked at each other somewhat puzzled by that statement. **You see in their minds each of them had decided to follow Jesus** and become one of His disciples—in that regard they had chosen Him not the other way around!

What they no doubt didn’t grasp at this point was the sovereignty of God and how God had chosen them to be saved and to serve Him long before they were ever born—again, “before time began!” Of course, the

immediate context was that these men didn't choose to be Jesus' *apostles*—that was something He had chosen for them to be.

But the ultimate idea behind the statement that they didn't choose Jesus, He chose them—is a positional truth that took place long ago—

Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Jesus makes it clear that we didn't choose God—He chose us in eternity past and at the right moment in time He called us and we responded and were saved!

The Apostle Peter tells us that we were “**elect**ed” by God according to His ‘**foreknowledge**.’ (1Peter 1:2)

The word ‘**elect**’ can also be translated ‘*chosen*’—which is how Paul used it in Eph.1:4—

Ephesians 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us [*for eternal life*] in Him before the foundation of the world...

On what basis did God *choose* or *elect* us for eternal life?

It wasn't on the basis of our internal goodness or external good works—Paul said in Titus 1:2, God chose us “*before time began*”—before we were ever created and had done anything ‘good’. **Once again, Peter tells us that God chose or elected us to salvation—“according to His foreknowledge”.**

“**Foreknowledge**” is a Greek word that means ‘*knowledge known in advance*’.

God knows all things before they happen—including and especially the things pertaining to redemption as we see clearly from Revelation 13:8 which tells us that Jesus was the Lamb “*slain before the world was made*”. (Explain)

The Greek word for ‘**foreknowledge**’ is *prognosin*—the word we get the word *prognostication* from which means—“**the action of foretelling or prophesying future events.**”

Now, those who are Calvinists say that this Greek word (‘foreknowledge’) actually means ‘*foreordination*’. In other words, God only knows the future because—He has foreordained the future.

He knows the future because He has *predetermined* the future—including all those who would be saved.

You see it wasn't that God just knew in advance (foreknowledge) those who would get saved and those who wouldn't—He predestined some to be saved and the others to be damned. A lot of Christians have a problem with the doctrine of predestination—however, it is taught in the Bible, so it is a biblical doctrine.

Ephesians 1:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵ having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...

REFLECTION: In your own words define “the foreknowledge of God”

Again, the whole idea of predestination troubles a lot of people—but much of it comes from not properly understanding *what* predestination means. The word ‘predestination’ comes from a Greek word that means “to predetermine or plan beforehand a person’s destiny.”

>>> Okay, the strict definition isn’t hard to understand—the problem comes when we try to figure out upon what basis does God predetermine someone’s destiny—is it based entirely upon His sovereign will or on our free will?

Extreme or hyper-Calvinists believe that in eternity past God chose some to be predestined to eternal life in heaven and the others He predestined to spend eternity in hell (doctrine of reprobation).

All of this was decided before any of us were ever born and without any free will on our part to choose where we wanted to spend eternity. In other words, we are nothing but puppets and God is the puppet Master—He makes us behave in certain ways and causes us to believe in or not believe in His Son—and we have no choice in the matter.

>>> Calvinists have such an excessive view of God’s sovereignty that they don’t believe that unbelievers even have the *capacity* to believe on their own—they believe that God has to *give* them the faith to believe if they’re going to be saved—

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

>>> Calvinists interpret Ephesians 2:8-9 to mean that not only does salvation come from God as a gift but so does the *faith* to believe—it also is a gift from God! They reason that if we had free-will and could choose to believe in Jesus—that would be a work and we can’t be saved by our works!

>>> I agree with that last part, **God only saves us by His grace apart from anything we could do to try to earn it.** However, the problem I have is with the first part of that argument that places believing or the exercising of faith into the category of *works*—which it clearly is not:

Romans 4:2-5 (NKJV)

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” ⁴ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵ But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

Paul here separates faith *from* works and doesn’t include it in the category of works.

Let’s think about this for a moment—how can simply receiving God’s gift of salvation by our faith be considered a work? Since when is receiving a gift a *meritorious* act (‘an act deserving honor’)?

Say that I am destitute and very sick, so sick that I am going to die if I don't get an operation soon—but I have no money for an operation. Then one day a wealthy man hears of my plight and hands me a check that is enough to cover everything.

In a very real sense, he is offering me salvation from death by giving me a gift of life. Now, is my reaching out and receiving that check a meritorious act? Will people applaud the one who *receives* the gift or the one who *gives* it by his kindness and grace?

I disagree with the Calvinists who believe that receiving God's gracious gift of eternal life through our faith is a meritorious act and therefore constitutes a work of the flesh which would negate the grace of God. At this point Calvinists would argue that an unbeliever is incapable of exercising saving faith in the first place because—they are dead!

REFLECTION: How might you try to explain "predestination" to someone?

They argue—"The Bible says that unbelievers are dead in trespasses and sins—a corpse can't believe unless God resurrects it, so neither can unbelievers exercise faith unless God regenerates them first and then gives them the faith to believe in Christ."

However, in the Bible *regeneration* is another way of saying *salvation*—which means that Calvinism teaches that a person has to get saved—BEFORE THEY CAN BE SAVED!

That is not only confusing—it is flat out unbiblical!

Again, **much of this is based on Ephesians 2:1 which says that before we got saved we were *dead in trespasses and sins***. The Calvinist likens spiritual death to physical death—and since a physical corpse can't believe—then neither can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins believe since they are a 'spiritual corpse.'

Now on the face of it, it seems like an airtight argument—but if we stop to carefully think it through the argument falls apart. **While it's true that a corpse cannot *believe* it is also true that a corpse cannot *sin* either!**

However, no Calvinist would deny that people who are dead in trespasses and sins can still sin! **When we're talking about unbelievers, spiritual death means '*separation*' from God not '*annihilation*.'**

If it were true that those who are dead in trespasses and sins cannot exercise faith or come to God because they are the total slaves of their sin nature and would never choose God—then they would also never be able to choose to do anything that's good or God-like (godly) either.

Unbelievers can show love to strangers. They can show kindness and mercy and unselfishness to others—these are all attributes of God. They can even demonstrate self-sacrifice by laying down their lives for others on the battlefield or as police officers or firefighters.

These qualities don't come from their sinful fallen nature—they come from that part of them that still reflects the God in whose image they were created.

Just as it's that part of them that can chose to do good even when it goes against their fallen nature's desire that they act evil and selfish—it's that same part of their being that can choose to believe in Jesus if they want to—it's called free will which was not annihilated at the Fall!

Distorted yes but destroyed no!

REFLECTION:

How would you explain "predestination"?

How would you explain 'regeneration'?

How would you define "spiritual death"?

Look, if it were true that God had to spiritually resurrect unbelievers (regenerate them) and give them faith to be saved because they have no capacity to believe in Jesus since they are dead in trespasses and sins. *If that were true, then all of the invitations from God to come and be saved in the Bible would be hypocrisy on His part.*

Why? Because, first of all, He is withholding the faith to believe and be saved from those He *hasn't* chosen for heaven—which makes the invitation to them a phony invitation since they have no free will to accept it!

With regard to those He has chosen to go to heaven—it's also a phony invitation because He really isn't *inviting* them to come and be saved (implying free will to accept or reject His offer).

He's dragging them *irresistibly* and forcing them to be saved (the "I" in the acronym 'TULIP'— *Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, Perseverance of the Saints*).

Yet the Bible contains many *invitations* for sinners to get right with God—in both the Old and New Testaments—based on their free will:

- *"Turn, please turn from your sins (and come to Me) for why will you die..."* (Ezekiel 18);
 - *"...let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him (come and) take the water of life freely"* (Revelation 22:17)
- *"Okay then Phil, how do you explain predestination?"* (where God predetermines someone's eternal destiny)?

Come back next week and I'll answer that question!

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