

GOD CHOSE US BEFORE THE FOUNDATION
OF THE WORLD

*“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are
my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts
higher than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9*

Keith S. Fifer

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FOREWORD

Jesus said to his disciples: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”* John 15:16

In this instance Jesus is speaking specifically of his disciples, whom he clearly chose and who left their work, homes, etc. and followed him.

This demonstrates God’s power to choose people for special assignments, such as apostles, evangelists, missionaries, just as he chose prophets in the Old Testament, and others such as David and Solomon.

We never ask the question, I believe, as to whether David had a choice in his selection to be King of Israel, and a prophet through the Psalms.

We seem to accept without question that this was an appropriate thing for God to do as part of his plan for David at the time, and for the subsequent birth of the Messiah in the line of David.

And, of course, God chose Mary to be the mother of our Lord, and we typically don’t demur about this.

We see these choices as being for very special reasons and different in some way from God choosing us to be believers in him. Perhaps we see them as being something like being chosen to receive a bequest from someone who decides to bestow riches upon us. Someone had to be chosen for these special purposes and we tend to regard the chosen person as being fortunate to be selected. We don’t regard them as deprived because they did not seem to have a choice in the matter, as in the case of the bequest.

The following discussion is intended to provide a few ideas on the subject, rather than an exhaustive treatment.

A. GOD CHOSE US

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight...” Ephesians 1:4

The fact that God chose us, that is, believers in him, before the foundation of the world, gives some people concern. They wonder how it can be true that we have a choice if we are already chosen by God.

Doesn't this mean we are like pawns in God's game of life – like puppets who are under God's control—without any free will?

My approach to questions like this is firstly to declare that, as God is perfect, there must be a good explanation for his saying he chose us before the foundation of the world.

Secondly, my approach is to seek this explanation. I had been seeking such an explanation for some time, when one day as I was studying my Bible, some ideas came into my mind.

At the time I was in Johannesburg, South Africa on a holiday and staying at a friend's place. I was studying for some exams for the Moore College Certificate of Theology to be undertaken when I returned to Sydney. The ideas seemed to me to be a very satisfactory explanation of this question of God's choosing us.

The next day, on a Saturday, we flew to Durban for a few days' stay with another friend. She said she wanted us to meet a special friend of hers at church on the Sunday, and she had invited the friend back to lunch after church. Over lunch I sat next to this friend and toward the end of the meal she turned to

me and said: “There is something that worries me very much—that God chose us before the foundation of the world. Don’t you think that’s very concerning?”

I said I believed I had an explanation for this saying, and proceeded to share the ideas which had come to me a couple of days before. She was completely satisfied with the explanation, as I had been.

It’s my pleasure now to share these ideas—I believe received from God—and I hope you also find them satisfying.

Firstly, if God chooses us, does this mean we don’t have any choice in the matter? Not necessarily.

The first idea which came to me was this. If a man chooses a woman for a wife, does this mean that the woman has no say in the matter? Obviously this is not so.

The second thought which came to be was this. Is there any connection between a man choosing a wife and God choosing a person?

The Bible says there is a very important connection.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”

Ephesians 5:31,32

In these verses it is clear that the word of Christ is telling us that the connection between God and his church is a form of marriage—and the church (that is, us) is called the “bride of Christ” in the Bible. Also Christ refers to himself on a number of occasions as the ‘bridegroom’. So God choosing us is like a

man choosing a wife in some respects, although obviously not identical in every respect.

If we were to ask the average husband and wife the question—Did he choose her or did she choose him? The answer would probably be—yes. In other words, they chose one another, but traditionally the man made the proposal, or the act of choosing.

Of course, it's not as simplistic as this where God is concerned. But let's look further.

The man doesn't always know that the woman he chooses will say yes—though it's quite intriguing to reflect on how many do say yes.

This could be because men choose a time to pop the question when they have some indication that the answer will probably be yes, usually after some mutual attraction has been established.

But when we consider God's choosing, he knows those who will say yes, and those who will say no, beforehand, as he is all-knowing. So we should not be surprised that he chooses those who will choose him.

If we, as fallible humans, think it's OK to choose wives who are likely to choose us, what is wrong with God, who is infallible, doing the same sort of thing, only perfectly, and as the man choosing a wife allows for complete freedom of choice for both parties, so it is with God choosing us.

B. BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

A second matter of concern for people is that God says he chose his people "before the foundation of the world".

An idea came to me about his also. The idea was as follows:

We understand from the Bible that “a thousand years is like yesterday to God”. C.S. Lewis explains this in his book ‘Mere Christianity’ as God being outside of space and time -- that God sees yesterday, today, and tomorrow at the same time.

C.S.Lewis says it’s like us looking at a short straight line on a piece of paper. We see the beginning of the line, the centre of the line, and the end of the line, all at the same time. So God choosing us before the foundation of the world takes on a new perspective in this light.

But returning to the man and his wife—would it matter if the man chose his wife an hour before he proposed, or a week before he proposed, or ten years before he proposed. It seems to me that it makes no difference to the legitimacy of the transaction, and its credibility and acceptability,.

c. CONCLUSION

It seems to me that we can too easily assume some irregularity in God’s dealing with us, if we are not careful. This is to be expected, as Satan is continuously trying to make us dissatisfied with what God says about himself and us in the Bible.

If, however, we take the view that God is perfect in wisdom and in love as our starting point, we will usually find that God provides us with satisfactory explanations for his ways and his thinking.