

For many of us, experiences of rejection are what mostly shape our sense of identity. Those moments we've all had of being skipped over, left out, unwanted and not chosen. These negative episodes not only inform the way we feel about ourselves, but the way we think about God and how we act with and toward others... (Read Ephesians 1:4)

As a kid I was a really bad athlete

- I still am... I'm okay with surfing, dirtbiking, skiing, snowboarding, etc., but I am horrible at all ball sports
 - One of my **earliest memories**... striking out at t-ball (in the championship game!)
- One of my **greatest fears** as a kid was when it was time to pick teams
 - I was always last or very near last
 - I was never the one who people wanted on their team... I was never **chosen**—people usually got me by default
- One of the effects this had on me was to make me **feel defeated** before I even stepped on the field/court
 - I was already convinced that I could and would only disappoint myself and others
 - The same is true for me today
 - Because I was never **chosen** I always feel defeated when facing a field or court
 - **Nobody could ever rescue me from this—I am trapped and doomed (in having never been chosen)**

Now let's think about our relationship with God

- We often feel defeated in it
- Even before we step on to the field (get out of bed)
- We already have a sense that all we could possibly do is disappoint ourselves and God

The reason is that we have been taught that **the good ones** always get **chosen**

- The good ones are the ones that God **wants** and **uses** and **blesses**
- And we realize that we are **not good** (if you think you are you are worst of all) (Scripture/Law)
- So we live in fear of rejection
 - Few of us think that God would ultimately reject us (once we are saved)
 - But many of us think that He at least rejects me today and must be disappointed with me (after all, I am disappointed with me)

And so once again, our identity (self-perception), gets largely shaped by a sense of rejection

- This informs the way we think, feel and act (toward God, self and others)
- Destructive behavior, perfectionism, ungodly competition, sabotage, belittling of others, self-loathing, fear

But what if we can be rescued?

The beautiful truth of the **Doctrine of Election**

- That (v. 4): **Even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes**

Let's talk a bit about this concept of being **chosen (election)**

- Since it is a topic that makes a lot of people uncomfortable

First of all... Election is not a human speculation, but a divine revelation. –John Stott¹

Scripture just simply says (without much explanation or defense) that **we are chosen/elect**

- In Scripture election is a statement, not an argument. –Martin Lloyd-Jones

John 15:16

You didn't choose me. I **chose** you.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and **has chosen you** to be his own people.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

As for us, we can't help but thank God for you, dear brothers and sisters loved by the Lord. We are always thankful that **God chose you** to be among the first to experience salvation—a salvation that came through the Spirit who makes you holy and through your belief in the truth.

1 Peter 1:2

God the Father knew you **and chose you** long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And it isn't as though election is just a New Testament thing

- God chose Israel in the OT

Everyone finds the doctrine of election difficult

- Because we also find the truth of **freewill** to be present
- God has created us with freewill and **proves such** by the fact that He holds us to be **morally responsible**

In Scripture we simply see both that:

- (1) God is sovereign and (2) man is responsible (2 clear poles established in Scripture)
 - There are 2 corollaries:²
 - God's sovereignty never functions to mitigate man's responsibility (Man is always responsible)
 - Man's responsibility never functions to diminish God's sovereignty (God is always sovereign)

In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies.³

- They exist side by side and work together in some mysterious way.

The doctrine of election presents us with a God who **defies finite analysis**.

- It is a doctrine that let's God be God⁴ (And leaves us realizing that we are not)

John Stott uses this explanation to highlight the 2 truths in tension

- 'Didn't I choose God?' somebody asks indignantly; to which we must answer 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first chosen you.'
- 'Didn't I decide for Christ?' asks somebody else; to which we must reply 'Yes, indeed you did, and freely, but only because in eternity God had first decided for you.'⁵

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Nottingham, England: IVP, 1979), 37.

² D. A. Carson calls this recognition of the tension between these two poles *compatibilism*

³ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2008), 43.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), 24.

⁵ Stott, 37.

“We must never allow our subjective experience of choosing Christ water down the fact that we would not have chosen him if he had not first chosen us.” -R. Kent Hughes⁶

So, what do we do with this?

- Well, admittedly, there are many questions
 - We can spend the next several hundred years talking about the tension, arguing about which truth wins out to the detriment of the other
 - We can wonder about who is not chosen
- **Or we can begin to think differently:**
 - Instead of **fretting over the questions** that the doctrine of **election** creates
 - Let’s begin to **rejoice in and live out the answers** that the doctrine of **election** provides

The big question of identity (of life) is “am I accepted?”

- When life tells us that we are not (through parents, peers, teachers, neighbors, bosses, magazines)
 - We spend the rest of our lives trying to **prove** that we are and **find** someone who agrees that we are
 - When we don’t, we wonder, “**Who am I? Am I ever going to be good enough?**” (Needs ultimate resolve)
- In the **search for self** and **acceptance** we resort to all sorts of strange and destructive behaviors
 - But Christ has already told us of the futility of this endeavor
 - “**You have to lose your life to find it**”
 - The truth being, we cannot actually find ourselves and so prove our worth
 - We have, rather, **been found** by God!

“Search for one’s **identity** is doomed to failure because it rests on the false premise that it is incumbent upon us to be successful in the search for self. Instead, **the gospel declares that we have been found**—that **identity** is a gift one can never obtain or reach on the basis of human effort.” –Eugene L. Lowry⁷

“Identity is a gift”... grace (verse 4 again)

The need for acceptance is dealt with by the **Father’s love** and His **choosing** of us

The mistake that we make is that “**we try to live so that He will love us, rather than living because He has already loved [and chosen] us.**”⁸

As long as we let our parents, teachers, friends, foes, etc determine whether or not we are **chosen**, we are living according to untruths.

- The **world and its way** of determining **whether or not** you are **chosen** are **false**

We can live according to a greater truth!

- That from **before the beginning of the world you were loved and chosen by God**
- Long before you were **rejected** by peers, **neglected** by parents, or **passed over** for promotions
- You were already **chosen** by God

⁶ Hughes, 24.

⁷ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville, KT.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 74.

⁸ Lloyd Ogilvie, quoted in Brennan Manning, *Ragamuffin Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah, 2005), 183.

Why were you chosen?

- God always **chooses** according to **His purposes**—not our personalities
- It has always been that way:
 - Deuteronomy 7:7-8 (Moses speaking to Israel about God’s choosing of them)
The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you... That is why the Lord rescued you...

We often think that there is something we either have **done or must do to win God’s favor**, but this cannot be so since **He chose us even before He made the world** (verse 4)

- What could we have possibly done?

We usually think: “**Oh I am chosen, therefore I am awesome!**” Or, “**I am not chosen, therefore I am worthless.**”

- With God, you are chosen—not because you are awesome, but because He is awesome in love.
- And He loves you—Not because you are valuable, but His love has made you valuable.
- You are not chosen because you were worthy, but you are of great worth because you have been **chosen!**

From 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Remember, dear brothers and sisters... God chose things the world considers **foolish**... And he chose things that are **powerless**... God chose things **despised** by the world, things counted as **nothing** at all... As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

God has united you with Christ Jesus... Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, “If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord.”

This doesn’t always resonate with us because we have this deep sense of needing to **be desirable**, needing to have **earned** something, be **deserving** of something, and be **worthy** of something

Here is where we err! That is a description of God!

- Only God is truly desirable in who He is
- Only God has truly earned praise in what He has done
- Only God is deserving, only God is worthy

Your discontent is the same as Eve’s! You want to be like God! (Desirable, deserving, worthy)

- Therefore you stand condemned with Eve!
- You need a Savior, and God has **chosen you** to be saved... you are **foolish** and **powerless** and **despised** and **nothing**; but **God has united you to Christ Jesus**, and He has **made you right with God**; He has made you **pure and holy** in God’s eyes by paying for your sins and exchanging your worthlessness for His worth!

Why then did God choose you?

- We can only say because of God’s **love** and His **great pleasure** (v. 5)!
- You must hear this as immensely warm and loving
- And freeing!
 - It is His **love** and **great pleasure**, not **our love** and **goodness**
 - Most of my feelings (and so actions) are shaped by the sense that “**I am not good enough**” or “**I did not do good enough**” or “**I don’t love God enough**”
 - Those are not the issues!
 - Yes, they are true
 - And apart from Christ you are defeated before you step on the field (but you have been rescued)

But you have been rescued!!

- The issue is no longer that you **are not** good enough—God **is** good enough
- The issue is no longer that you have **not done** good enough—Christ **has done** good enough on our behalf
- The issue is no longer that you **do not** love God enough—God **loves** you enough

“The most difficult part of mature faith is allowing ourselves to be the object of God’s delight.”⁹

Think rightly about this...

Though we used ‘human choosing’ in the beginning as an illustration, we must realize that one of the results of our fallenness is that human choosing creates pride

- In juxtaposition to this, God’s choosing of us can only create in us **a profound sense of humility and thanksgiving**
- The reason God chose us was **in Himself** (His love) **not in us** (our merit)
 - I’ve been walking with the Lord for almost 20 years
 - I’ve been teaching the bible for about 15 years
 - I have never felt more sinful, wicked and undeserving in my life
 - I have never felt more **loved** and **chosen** in my life
 - **God expects more failure from me than I expect from myself!** He knew... and He still chose me!
- The gospel says I am both! (wicked and chosen; unworthy and loved)
 - But **my identity** is no longer formed by **rejection**, but by **election!!!**
 - Not by the fact that **I am bad**, but that **Christ is good** and has **done good** for me!!!
 - He has **chosen** me to be **without fault in His eyes** (Holy and Blameless)—in **Christ!**
 - (Cf. **5:27; Col 1:22; Jude 24-25**)
- So, what this causes us to do is **praise God!**
 - Cf. verses 3 and 14
- And it causes us to want to **live for God** (to be holy because we are holy)
 - Because:
 - (1) We have a new nature that actually longs for holiness (though we do struggle)
 - (2) Scripture tells us to live differently (Cf. Ephesians 4:1 — **lead a life worthy of your calling**)
 - (3) Incongruous living is exhausting

One of the ways that we live congruously with the truth of election is to **accept ourselves**

- **Self-loathing** and never-ending **self castigation** is **incongruent** with **election**
- It simply isn’t right to forever **hold against ourselves** what was **nailed against the Cross**
- It is simply wrong to refuse to **forgive ourselves** where God (**in Christ**) has **forgiven us**
- It will not do to refuse to **accept ourselves** when God (**in Christ**) has **accepted us**

“The miraculous movement from self-rejection to **self-acceptance**... is not based on therapy or the power of positive thinking; it is anchored in [the] personal experience of the **acceptance of Jesus Christ**. It is not the result of pop-psychology, it is an **act of faith** in the grace of God.” -Brennan Manning¹⁰

⁹ Alan Jones as quoted in *Ragamuffin Gospel*, 224

¹⁰ Manning, 218 and 49.

This act of faith changes the way we live with others in the world

When we **live out of a sense of rejection**:

- We constantly **need to** prove our selves worthy of acceptance
- We often do this through perfectionism, ungodly competition, sabotage and belittling others

When **we accept ourselves** (because God in Christ has accepted us):

- We are **less prone to** belittle others, long for power, and vie for position and popularity
- We are no longer wrecked by criticism and failure and being second... or last
 - So we do not need to criticize others to feel better about us
 - We do not need to beat them down to pull ourselves up
 - We can actually be humble and loving and accepting

When we **live out of a sense of election**:

- We are **free from** having to prove ourselves acceptable and we are able to promote, praise, help and serve others.
- "... the gospel... is the freedom of loving others as we love ourselves. And we can now love ourselves because we are in fact loved by God. No longer *having* to prove our own worth, we may now be set free from making others prove themselves to us." –Eugene L. Lowry¹¹
 - Because what appears to be arrogance, looking down on others, is often, actually a refusal to accept self
 - We think to lowly of ourselves so we must make others lower that we might feel better
 - That makes the game of life a bummer

In sports, if I had always won and played every game perfectly, and so was always chosen to be on the team, I would step onto the field differently

- Because we are in Christ, we stand before God differently
 - Not as dirty, but as holy
 - Not as judged and shamed and at odds with God, but as recipients of grace who have peace with God
 - Not as cursed, but as blessed
 - Not as rejected, but as elected (because of God's love and for God's great pleasure)

God, in Christ, may be the only one who ever validates you

- And that is okay—more than enough
- In fact, to seek more is folly—sin
- "keep us from such folly Lord!"

¹¹ Lowry, 86.