
GOD CHOOSES

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God Makes Choices

One of the striking features of the Bible is the overwhelming superiority of God's will relative to man's will. There is usually very little recognition of that fact, but in the reckoning of the Scriptures, man's will is relatively insignificant in the overall scheme of things. As Solomon noted in Proverbs 21:1:

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

[Note: All Scripture references in this article are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

The king assuredly believes he is making his own decisions. He is unaware God is directing his heart in whatever direction He wills; the king believes he is fully in charge. This is no doubt generally true of all political leaders, who may believe they are the masters of their own fate. The reality is quite different. God's will overcomes all opposition and He directs the course of human events as He sees fit.

In the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, there is a reference to ten kings that were represented by ten horns in the vision that the apostle John saw (Revelation 17:12). In verse 17, we learn that God supplies the ten kings with the opinion He wants them to have in order to accomplish His words:

Revelation 17:17 (Concordant Literal New Testament):

for God imparts to their hearts to form His opinion, and to form one opinion, and to give their kingdom to the wild beast, until the words of God shall be accomplished.

This statement is actually quite remarkable. This is Proverbs 21:1 in action. Here are ten specific kings who will be present at the conclusion of this age and the return of Christ, the period of time that the book of Revelation is describing. They have achieved a consensus of opinion to give their kingdoms in support of the wild beast, the great world dictator of the end time. The problem is, they're quite unaware that their opinion is really not their opinion at all, but God's "opinion", as it were. He supplied it. Thinking that it's their opinion, not God's, they will thereby accomplish God's words. God demonstrates His indomitable will. What is called God's "opinion" is really what He has determined the ten kings should do. This is a theme that will be touched on throughout this article.

God Chooses But Is Not Chosen

What does the superior will of God have to do with His choices? As we peruse the Scriptures looking for examples of God choosing something, we invariably see that the will of those whom

He chooses for some purpose was not consulted. Jesus' choice of His twelve apostles, as described in the Gospels, is a good example.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus first chose Simon, Andrew, James, and John while they were engaged with fishing. These four came immediately when Jesus called.

Matthew 4:18-22

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Matthew, the writer of this Gospel, was called next

Matthew 9:9

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

Jesus had no discussion with any of these five regarding the nature of their coming mission. They immediately stopped what they were doing and followed Him. Jesus simply told Simon and Andrew that He would make them fishers of men.

John 13 through 17 records Jesus' final discourse with His apostles before the crucifixion. In 15:16 Jesus tells them that He chose His apostles and that they did not choose Him:

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, ...

If the twelve did not choose Jesus, didn't they have to make an effort to at least accept Jesus' calling? Jesus gave them no credit whatsoever. He chose them and placed them as His apostles, referring to the twelve. For the twelve, there was no possibility of taking some alternate action. If the twelve, on their own volition and ability had to accept Jesus' choosing, then they were choosing Jesus, which Jesus said they did not do. God's will is superior.

Paul Was A Chosen Vessel

Certainly one of the great men of God in the Scriptures is the Apostle Paul. Yet he didn't become such through his own effort or choice. On the contrary, he describes himself an enemy of Christ, a calumniator, a persecutor, and an outrager (I Timothy 1:13, Concordant Literal New Testament). In spite of all this, and unbeknown to Paul, God had designated him a chosen vessel

to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel (Acts 9:15). He didn't sign up to be a chosen vessel. He was God's choice. Paul describes it this way:

I Timothy 1:14-16 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, foremost of whom am I. But therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ should be displaying all His patience, for a pattern of those who are about to be believing on Him for life eonian.

God's grace overwhelmed all of Paul's opposition and changed him into one of His greatest servants. He was a pattern for all those who are about to be believing on Christ.

Four times in the New Testament, Paul says he was an apostle, not by his own will or choice, but by the will of God (I Corinthians 1:1, II Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, II Timothy 1:1). God's indomitable will can overcome all opposition, even that of one of the greatest persecutors of the saints, such as Paul.

Jesus Chose Judas Iscariot

Not only does God choose positively, He also chooses negatively, as it suits His purpose. As we will learn later in Romans the ninth chapter, there are vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. Both of these designations are determined entirely by God, as remarkable as that might seem. Judas Iscariot, whom the Scriptures term a traitor (Luke 6:16), was designated by God as a vessel of dishonor.

Judas was chosen by Jesus for the express purpose of betraying Him. Why would Jesus do this? He did so in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. He stated this very thing to the apostles on the night of His betrayal in John 13:16-19, with Judas present:

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: **but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.** Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.*

The Scripture to which Jesus is referring is Psalm 41:9:

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

Jesus interpreted Psalm 41:9 as a scripture that had to be fulfilled, and Judas was chosen as a vessel of dishonor to fulfill it. Satan also had a part to play in this drama, as he entered into Judas that night to ensure he would betray Jesus (John 13:2, 13:27).

But the positive side of their actions was that Jesus accomplished the mission for which He was sent, which was to die for the sins of the world (1 John 2:1-2). The actions taken by Satan and Judas were in accordance with the “*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23). In fact, all of the actors in the drama of the crucifixion played the part assigned to them, including the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government. God had the much higher purpose of dealing with the sins of the entire world. Jesus said that through His death, He would draw all men to himself:

John 12:32-33

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.

Dishonor Is Temporary

Yet the reader should not think any vessel of dishonor, chosen by God for a particular purpose, is thereby doomed to interminable torment or any other eternal sentence because of God’s choice. It is our natural instinct to reject such a thought as being inconsistent with God’s love and as well as common sense. The Scriptures bear this out and will be discussed more fully in a later part.

Vessels of dishonor play a temporary part to accomplish God’s higher purposes and it is God’s divine prerogative to choose such vessels as He sees fit, as opposed to those that are chosen during the present time for God’s mercy and salvation.

The next part discusses God’s choosing of a particular nation to be a blessing to all other nations.

God Chooses Israel

Most of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, has to do with the nation of Israel and other nations as they came into contact with Israel. The primary exception to this are the epistles of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. Paul had a commission to bring an entirely different message to all nations that was distinguished from the message that was brought to Israel.

Paul said he was entrusted with the apostleship of the Gentiles, which he called the Uncircumcision, as the Apostle Peter was for the apostleship of the Circumcision, which was Israel and those who were proselytes of Judaism. Paul's message was a message of salvation in Christ to all nations, not just Israel, completely apart from any works and entirely in grace (Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-10). This was distinct from the message that Peter and his colleagues preached, which very much involved works as well as faith and was directed to the people of Israel.

Among the nations of the earth, God chose Israel to have a special relationship to Himself and to be a special people to Him.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God's Choice of Israel Began With Abraham

The oath that God had sworn to their fathers began with Abraham in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis (Genesis 17:1-19). God promised to Abram, whose name was changed to Abraham, that he would be the progenitor of many nations and that He would give to Abraham and his offspring the land of Canaan. This came in the form of a covenant that God made with him, the token of which would be the act of circumcision. All males in Abraham's household were required to be circumcised, including those servants who were acquired by money.

The covenant of circumcision was to continue with Isaac, the son that Abraham's wife, Sarah, bore at the remarkable age of ninety, as promised by God. Then to Isaac's son, Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28), and through him to his twelve sons, who were the progenitors of the twelve-tribe nation of Israel.

A Channel of Blessing

What was the purpose of God's choice of Israel? Was it just an end in itself? God had a greater goal, which was that Abraham, through the nation of Israel that came through Isaac and Jacob, was to be a blessing to all nations.

Genesis 12: 2-3:

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Yet this goal of blessing all families of the earth has never been realized. The nation of Israel could never realize this goal on their own. It will not be accomplished until the return of Christ in the future, when He establishes the Kingdom to which the Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament pointed and to which Jesus Himself referred when He was on earth:

Matthew 4:17

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The Prophet Daniel Foretells God's Coming Kingdom

The setting up of God's Kingdom in the future was vividly seen in a dream by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, which was interpreted for him by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 2). In his dream, the king saw an image of a man with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of iron mixed with clay. A stone cut out without hands smote the feet and broke them to pieces. Then the entire image was pulverized and blown away by the wind. The stone then filled the entire earth (Daniel 2:31-35).

Daniel's interpretation of the dream was that it represented four chronologically successive world-dominating kingdoms. The gold represented the Babylonian empire in which Daniel lived, to be followed in time by the Persian empire, represented by silver, the Grecian empire, represented by brass, and, finally, a fourth kingdom of iron. The fourth kingdom also had feet of iron and clay, indicating a lack of cohesion (Daniel 2:36-43). Daniel then interprets the stone in verses 44 and 45 of chapter 2:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the

king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

This kingdom, whose source was heaven, was to be established on earth and was to replace all human governments with the government of God. The fourth kingdom, which will be in existence at the return of Christ, will be destroyed by Christ, and all human government will pass out of existence as depicted by the pulverizing of the entire image of the man. Human government will then never return. All rule will be in the hands of God's Anointed from that time forward.

The Kingdom That Was Near Did Not Come

Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2) and Jesus Himself, as mentioned above, preached that the time was near for this Kingdom to come. Yet it did not come. It has been roughly two thousand years since the Kingdom was being preached as being near. It is to be a literal kingdom on earth with Christ ruling the nations with an iron rod (Psalm 2). Such a kingdom has not yet materialized and is still future. Its establishment will be accompanied by God's judgments against the nations of the earth as described by the book of Revelation. These judgments have not yet happened.

Why did it not come at the time of John the Baptist, when he was preaching that it was near? Jesus came as Israel's Messiah, but He was rejected by the Jewish leadership and by the nation as a whole. When Jesus was walking among them, some in Israel believed, and many thousands believed at the preaching of Peter at the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and the subsequent preaching of the twelve in the book of Acts. But Jesus as their Messiah was generally rejected by Israel, so the Kingdom did not come at that time.

God Chose a Remnant Out of Israel

The Apostle Paul explains this state of affairs in Romans 11. At the time of the prophet Elijah, almost the entire nation of Israel had apostatized. Elijah thought he was the only one still faithful and made intercession to God. But God's word to him was that he was not alone and that God had left for Himself seven thousand men who did not bow the knee to the heathen god Baal (Romans 11:3-4). Similarly, Paul said that at the present time, when he was writing, there was a remnant out of Israel that God chose simply as a matter of His grace:

Romans 11:5-6

Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

Paul clearly states that God's choice of this remnant in Israel is by grace and entirely apart from works, otherwise it would no longer be a matter of grace.

God Did Not Cast Israel Away

Since the Kingdom did not come, it might be concluded that God had cast away His people. Such a conclusion would be a mistake:

Romans 11:1-2

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. ...

It was actually never God's intention that the nation as a whole would accept its Messiah. Paul goes on to explain in Romans 11:7-8:

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

This is actually quite a remarkable statement by Paul. Only the election, those whom God chose, did not apostatize throughout Israel's history, including the time of Elijah. Only those whom God chose would accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah when He appeared. The rest were blinded. Were they blinded because they were hard-hearted? They had no choice because God gave them a spirit of slumber so that they could not see or hear. It was also God's choice that they should not believe at that time.

Israel Will Yet Fulfill Its Purpose

As God has not cast away His people, Israel will yet fulfill its purpose of being a blessing to all nations and will bring all nations to God. This cannot happen until the return of Messiah in the future, when Christ establishes His one-thousand year reign. Paul further explained to the Romans in 11:25-28:

... blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

God's Two Choices With Israel

So we actually see two choices relative to Israel. First, they were chosen as the nation to be a blessing to all other nations. They cannot succeed in this until the "*fulness of the Gentiles be come in*". That fullness refers to the work God has been doing among the Gentiles for the last two millennia. When God has completed that work, He will take the nation up again and thus save all Israel.

The other choice of God relative to Israel is His choice of those among Israel prior to the coming of Messiah who will be true to God and accept Jesus as their Messiah. These will enter into the Kingdom to come and were chosen by God. The call goes out to many in Israel, but God's chosen are few (Matthew 20:16). This election, or choice, of such, as Paul described in Romans 11:5-6 above, is entirely by grace. Whatever works that are accomplished by the chosen are accomplished by His grace.

God Reveals a Secret

The Kingdom that was near at the time of John the Baptist, with Israel as the dominant nation, did not materialize at that time. This was not a mistake on God's part, as God Himself gave the majority in Israel a spirit of slumber. The nation as a whole was unable to believe, except for the chosen few. The reason for this was that God was about to reveal a wonderful secret during the time Israel was temporarily set aside that has to do with a body of believers entirely apart from Israel, in which physical heritage is irrelevant. This we discuss in the next part.

God Chooses the Church

There's a Greek word in the New Testament, *ekklesia*, as transliterated into English letters, that is usually translated *church* in the King James Version (KJV). This word simply means those that have been called out into a group. What group is being talked about has to be determined from the context.

For example, in Acts 19:39-41 it is used twice in the space of three verses in two different contexts, both times translated *assembly*. Paul had caused a riot in the city of Ephesus because his preaching had impacted the profitable trade in silver temples of the Ephesian goddess Artemis, translated *Diana* in the KJV. A man by the name of Alexander was enlisted to speak to the rioters (*ekklesia*) gathered in the theater. His advice was they were not to do anything rash and that if they had any charges against Paul or any man, bring them before a court of law, a legal assembly (*ekklesia*). He then dismissed the assembly (*ekklesia*).

Acts 19:39-41

*But if ye enquire concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful **assembly** (*ekklesia*). For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the **assembly** (*ekklesia*).*

From this it should be clear that the Greek word *ekklesia* should be interpreted in whatever context it appears. When this part discusses the "church", what is meant is the church, or *ekklesia*, that present-day Christians think of when they are using that term. It is also the *ekklesia* that is associated with the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

To see this requires a brief survey of how the present-day church actually developed as described by the Scriptures. Then we can see how God's choice of the members of the church comes into play.

God Expands His Reach

At the time of Christ in the first century, any Gentile that wanted to seek God had to do so through the medium of Israel. After all, Israel had the advantage of having a relationship with the true God and having His laws and being in a covenant relationship with Him (Romans 9:1-5). These were enormous advantages no other nation had.

Those Gentiles that wanted to seek God did so by becoming proselytes of Judaism, e.g. the Ethiopian eunuch and the Roman centurion Cornelius, described in Acts 8:26-39 and Acts 10, respectively. The Ethiopian eunuch was preached to by Phillip and Cornelius by Peter, both by an express command from God. Otherwise, these apostles wouldn't have reached out beyond Israel.

For the prospective proselyte, the path to God was through the apostles in Jerusalem who had walked with Jesus during His earthly life. The only *ekklesia* at that time was the body of Jewish believers that had accepted Jesus as Messiah and any proselytes of Judaism. These were only a small minority of the nation of Israel.

Saul of Tarsus, who later became the Apostle Paul, is introduced in Acts at the end of the seventh chapter, the beginning of the eighth chapter, and especially in the ninth chapter, where his calling by God is described. Saul was one of the greatest persecutors of the Jewish followers of Jesus. His enthusiasm for persecution was exceeded only by his later tireless efforts in preaching a separate gospel from the one that the Jerusalem apostles preached, which was directed beyond Israel to the nations of the world.

In Acts 9, Saul is struck down and blinded on the road to Damascus by the Lord Jesus. In the words of the Lord, “... *he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:*” (Acts 9:15). With God’s choice of Saul, He begins to expand His reach outside of the nation of Israel. Saul was to bear His name before the Gentiles, as well as kings and Israel. This was an entirely new development.

Two Gospels

It is commonly thought that in the Scriptures there is only one gospel and that one gospel was the only one preached in the first century. However, the gospel that God assigned Paul to preach was not the same gospel as that preached by the existing Jerusalem apostles. Paul writes in his epistle to the Galatians that the gospel he received came directly to him through a revelation of Jesus Christ and was not received from any man (Galatians 1:11-12). If he were to preach the same gospel as the apostles before him, he could simply get it from them and would need no revelation. Neither did his apostleship come through the existing apostles but through Jesus Christ and God the Father (Galatians 1:1). His credentials were impeccable.

Paul tells us in the second chapter of Galatians that at least seventeen years after his conversion he met with the Jerusalem apostles about the physical rite of circumcision, which was the identifying sign to the nation of Israel and originally given by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:9-14. It also applied to any foreigners that lived among them. Failure to circumcise resulted in being cut off from the people. Therefore it was an extremely important rite to Israel.

Yet the gospel that Paul took to the Gentiles did not include circumcision. To emphasize that point, he called his gospel the “gospel of the Uncircumcision” and the gospel the Jerusalem apostles preached the “gospel of the Circumcision” (Galatians 2:7-8). Paul called his gospel something that the faithful, law-keeping Jew would have been cut off for! In fact, even more shocking, Paul’s gospel included freedom from law-keeping entirely and, instead, justification by the faith of Christ and not by works of law (Galatians 2:16).

The Galatians had been listening to people that were pushing circumcision as a physical rite that was needed for salvation. Paul strongly condemned this. His question to the Galatians is found in Galatians 3:1-3:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

No physical rite or law-keeping could justify the Galatians or anyone else. If righteousness came by the law, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:21). All of this ran counter to the gospel preached by Peter and the other eleven apostles, which consisted of law-keeping, repentance, baptism, and the pardon of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul's gospel of justification by faith was entirely apart from law keeping and a complete acquittal, rather than a pardon, through the saving work of Christ on the cross.

This does not mean that Peter's gospel of the Circumcision was not valid. It simply means that the gospel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision that Paul preached were two different gospels, the former being directed to the sons of Israel and their proselytes, the latter to the nations and to any Jew that might accept Paul's gospel.

There's More

Paul's teaching regarding justification by faith completely apart from law-keeping must have been a shock to the Jerusalem apostles that came before him. The apostles in Jerusalem taught no such thing. Yet Paul taught the Galatians that Christ was of no effect to them if they wanted to be justified by law-keeping. If that's what they wanted, they were fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

Not only that, but Paul also taught the remarkable doctrine that God had not only conciliated the believers under Paul's ministry to Himself, but that He had also conciliated the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them. The difference was that believers were also conciliated to God and were therefore reconciled, whereas the world had not reconciled to God. This doctrine was only taught by the Apostle Paul.

II Corinthians 5:18-19 (Concordant Literal New Testament):

Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us the word of the conciliation.

The Body of Christ

Among the other doctrines taught by the Apostle Paul was that of the body of Christ. This refers to that unique body of believers that came under the his ministry. This body was entirely separate from those believers under the gospel of the Circumcision that was preached by Peter in Acts 2. It consisted of both Gentiles and Israelites that were justified by faith alone apart from the Law. The gospel of the Circumcision was directed entirely to Israel and any proselytes of Judaism but was not directed to the Gentiles.

Paul was the apostle to the nations but he was an Israelite and those who helped him were mostly Jewish. The body of Christ consisted of both Gentile and Jewish believers and was completely apart from Judaism and law-keeping. This doctrine of the body of Christ is entirely unique to the apostle Paul and is found nowhere else in the Scriptures except in his epistles.

He first speaks of believers being one body in Christ in Romans 12:5. In I Corinthians 10:17, he speaks of the many believers being one body. It is in I Corinthians 12 that Paul gives a fuller explanation of the one body and calls believers the body of Christ, indicating the intimate relationship believers have with the Lord:

I Corinthians 12:27-28 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Now you are the body of Christ, and members of a part, whom also God, indeed, placed in the ecclesia, ...

The Members Are Chosen

This unique body of believers that came into being through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, completely separate from those Jewish believers that had accepted Jesus as Messiah under the ministry of the twelve apostles in Jerusalem, were placed there by God, as it says in I Corinthians 12:27-28 above. They did not of themselves evaluate the possibilities of membership in the body of Christ or make a decision based on the pros and cons before deciding to join or not. They were chosen by God and placed in the body. .

This body of believers under the Apostle Paul's ministry is the present-day church, not the Jewish believers under the gospel of the Circumcision preached by Peter and the others. Those Jewish believers had a gospel of works and law-keeping as well as faith. Paul, however, taught the Galatians that they were exempted from Christ if they were justified by law (Galatians 5:4, Concordant Literal New Testament). Law-keeping as a means of salvation would exempt the Galatians from Christ, the exact opposite of the gospel of the Circumcision, where law-keeping was still in effect. God can, and does, deal with different groups of people in different ways as He sees fit. The Jewish believers under Peter had a separate gospel and destiny.

Not Many Noble

Lest the members of the body of Christ consider themselves superior, Paul tells them that there is no cause to think highly of themselves. God may choose some that are mighty and noble in this world, but not many.

I Corinthians 1:26-29

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

These brethren, as Paul calls them, although mostly weak, did not choose God. God chose them. Not only that, but Paul makes the remarkable statement, in his letter to the Ephesians, that God chose the believers who are in the body of Christ long before they were born, as incredible as that may be.

Ephesians 1:4-5 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

according as He chooses us in Him before the disruption of the world, we to be holy and flawless in His sight, in love designating us beforehand for the place of a son for Him through Christ Jesus; in accord with the delight of His will,

The members of the present-day church, the body of Christ, were chosen by God long before they were even born.

Those Jewish believers under the gospel of the Circumcision were likewise chosen (Rom 11), but those believers were under a regimen of both faith and works, plus baptism for the pardon of sins, rather than justification entirely by faith apart from any law-keeping.

God's Secret

Even though the body of Christ proclaimed by the Apostle Paul was separate from the Jewish believers under the gospel of the Circumcision, Israel still had a position of prominence. When Paul met with the apostles in Jerusalem some years after his conversion, he explained the gospel he preached to the Gentiles. This is described in Acts 15 as well as Paul's epistle to the Galatians. The Jerusalem apostles accepted that Paul had a different gospel to preach to the Gentiles. They simply gave Paul a series of decrees for the Gentiles believers to adhere to. This indicated the subservience of the Gentile church to Israel at that time.

However, in Paul's Ephesian epistle a dramatic change occurred that God had kept secret but was now revealing to the Apostle Paul. Paul tells us about the wonderful secret God revealed to him in Ephesians 3:3-7 (Concordant Literal New Testament):

for by revelation the secret is made known to me (according as I write before, in brief, by which you who are reading are able to apprehend my understanding in the secret of the Christ, which, in other generations, is not made known to the sons of humanity as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets): in spirit the nations are to be joint enjoyers of an allotment, and a joint body, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which I became the dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of the grace of God, which is granted to me in accord with His powerful operation.

Here Paul tells us he is the dispenser of an evangel, or gospel, that now puts all members of the body of Christ on an equal footing, whether Jew or Gentile. All are joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus. There is no hint of this anywhere in the Scriptures prior to the Apostle Paul.

Previous to this, Israel was God's choice among the nations to be a blessing to all other nations. This is a mission they have not yet fulfilled. At the present time God has set Israel aside as a nation and has taken up the body of Christ, the present-day church, comprised of both Jew and Gentile without distinction. However, the time will come when God will yet again take up Israel as a nation at the return of Christ to make them a blessing to all nations during the coming one-thousand year reign of Messiah. However, Israel's defection at the present time does not affect those Jewish believers in Messiah under the gospel of the Circumcision.

Paul explains in Ephesians 2:11-22 that, even though the Gentiles were at one time far from God and having no expectation, He has now brought them near and created a new humanity in Christ. Both Jew and Gentile are now reconciled in one body to God. The physical pre-eminence of Israel was no longer in force in the body of Christ. All are of equal rank. The Gentiles were now fellow citizens and members of God's family. This is now the standing that all have, whether Jew or Gentile, in the present-day church.

No One Joins

Today's church that is the body of Christ as taught by the Apostle Paul has members that have been placed there by God (I Corinthians 12). No one actually joins by signing up in some way. Remarkably, they were chosen by God long before they were born: "*according as He chooses us in Him (Christ) before the disruption of the world ...*" (Ephesians 1:4, Concordant Literal New Testament). God's choice of the members of the body of Christ cannot be emphasized enough. Membership in the church is normally thought of as something that we decide and that consequently we give God permission to enter our lives. This is far from the truth. God chooses and God places the members in the body.

Designated Beforehand

Romans 8:29-30 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

whom He foreknew, He designates beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of His Son, for Him to be Firstborn among many brethren. Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also.

God designated those He chose to be glorified through a process of being called and then justified. This is entirely of God and is not of those being so designated.

All such have been chosen by God and are beyond any condemnation.

Romans 8:33-34 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

*Who will be indicting God's **chosen** ones? God, the Justifier? Who is the Condemner? Christ Jesus, the One dying, yet rather being roused, Who is also at God's right hand, Who is pleading also for our sakes?*

A Display of God's Grace

These chosen ones, the one body in which there are no physical distinctions, have been given a celestial destiny and, in the ages to come, will be a display of God's grace.

Ephesians 2:4-7

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

If the church, the body of Christ, was chosen by God long before they were born and saved entirely by God's grace apart from any works and can take no credit for their own salvation, this begs the question about the state of the unchosen. After all, if the chosen can take no credit, why does not God choose all at this time? This will be addressed in *Part 6: What About The Vessels Of Dishonor?*, where we see that God is the love that He claims He is (1 John 4:8) and that He has not forgotten those He presently did not choose.

Is There Actually Conditional Grace?

We learned in the prior part that salvation is by grace. It is entirely God's gracious gift. It is accomplished by the work of Christ and is not due to our own efforts. This is true both for Israel under the gospel of the Circumcision and for the body of Christ, the church, under the ministry of the apostle Paul. Salvation is freely given by God without conditions being attached. The recipients of this salvation during the present time are chosen by God. No one chooses himself.

However, it would be well to pause here to address a claim in orthodox Christian theology that salvation by grace, in spite of being God's gracious gift, has conditions attached to it. In other words, God's gracious gift is not quite as gracious as first thought because if some condition is not met, the gift can be withdrawn. In fact, according to this claim, God's salvation should instead be called an offer instead of a gift. A gift is normally understood to be given without anything being received or required in return. It would be a poor gift, indeed, if something is expected in return. In fact, it wouldn't be a gift at all. It would be an exchange.

According to this claim, what condition would be required? Typically it would be something like "accepting Jesus", or "letting God into your life". The general idea is that the recipient of God's grace must make the first move and give God permission to save him. Once permission is given, God now has a green light to proceed to save him. Without it, God is unable to do anything.

The above description of salvation by grace as taught in orthodox Christianity may seem a bit overstated, but it's actually not. That is essentially the path to salvation in much of Christianity. By this reckoning, man very much has a part to play; salvation is impossible without him. This conveniently gives man a large share of the glory. After all, God really has His hands tied unless man opens the door for him. Man's will becomes the equal of God's.

But is this really what salvation by grace entails in the Scriptures? Let's look at Paul's definition of grace in Romans 11. In verses 1 to 4, Paul says that in the time of the prophet Elijah practically the entire nation of Israel had apostatized. Yet God had left for Himself seven thousand men who did not bow the knee in idolatry. This was apparently unknown to Elijah.

Similarly, in Paul's time, there was a remnant in Israel according to God's choice of grace. God chose the remnant, not man (Romans 11:5). Paul goes on to say in verse 6 (Concordant Literal New Testament):

Now if it is in grace, it is no longer out of works, else the grace is coming to be no longer grace. Now, if it is out of works, it is no longer grace, else the work is no longer work.

The remnant in Israel to which Paul refers were chosen by God in grace. And if it is in grace, there were no works involved. Grace and works cannot mix. It is not a combination of God's grace and man's works. God chooses in His grace entirely apart from any works of man.

Likewise those believers today who have faith in the Lord Jesus did not sign up to be in the body of Christ, the church. They were chosen by God and placed into the body by God. There is nothing conditional about this.

Membership in the body of Christ is entirely of God and as He determines, not as man determines. "*Who will be indicting God's **chosen** ones?*" Paul asks in Romans 8:33. The gracious nature of God's salvation for the church apart from conditions is most aptly described by Paul in the second chapter of Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Those God has chosen to be saved in this present age were saved by grace. Since their salvation is by God's grace, there are no works supplied by man to facilitate this salvation. Only those who have faith are saved, but this faith is not ginned up by man but given by God as His gracious gift to enable the salvation of the believer and that the believer may appreciate what God has already done for him. Since no man can boast of what he did to be saved, salvation is not of man's works. If man's works had anything to do with it, it would not be by grace. In the final analysis, the believer is God's workmanship, and His alone.

In spite of the fact that the Scriptures are so clear on this subject, many believers may have difficulty accepting the fact that they are entirely God's workmanship and have performed no works whatsoever to somehow obligate God to save them. God is under no obligation. God's chosen ones (Romans 8:33, Concordant Literal New Testament) were already designated beforehand, before any works could be performed to induce God to save them.

Romans 8:30 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also.

The believer is designated beforehand, before any works, then called, then justified from all sin, and finally glorified in the presence of Christ. Could anything be more glorious? And it is entirely of God, not man, lest any man should boast.

The Apostle Paul A Pattern

The apostle who teaches us that the church consists of members of the body of Christ tells us that he is a pattern for all those that follow him.

I Timothy 1:16 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

But therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ should be displaying all His patience, for a pattern of those who are about to be believing on Him for life eonian.

A few verses before this, Paul tells us that he was a calumniator (a slanderer), a persecutor of those who believed in the Lord Jesus, and an outrager. He was basically one of God's worst enemies.

Paul describes this unfortunate time in his life in Acts 26:9-11, a time when he was enthusiastic in persecuting the Jewish saints and committed much that was "*contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*". He goes on to describe his encounter with the resurrected Christ as a light that was greater than the noonday sun. The pattern that Paul is presenting is not that those saved subsequently would have the same encounter, but that they would be overwhelmed by God's grace.

I Timothy 1:14-15 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Yet the grace of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, foremost of whom am I.

As Paul was the pattern for those that would follow him and he was overwhelmed by God's grace, likewise those that God calls are likewise overwhelmed by His grace. He chooses those that are to be members of the body of Christ, the "church", places them in the body, and provides them the faith they need to appreciate His calling and the position He has given them. All is entirely of God, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-10).

This is difficult for most to accept as it is natural to be self-centered and want to gather some credit for ourselves. Yet that is not the teaching of the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, no one saves himself by doing any work. Instead, believers are God's achievement (Ephesians 2:10, Concordant Literal New Testament). There is nothing conditional about God's achievement.

God's Choice Is Not Always Positive

So far we've talked about God's choice of Israel to be a blessing to all other nations and God's choice of the members of the church, which is the body of Christ. In Israel's case, their mission to be a blessing cannot occur until the return of Christ in the future. In the case of the church, which has been chosen by God, in the eons to come they will be a display of God's transcendent grace (Ephesians 2: 7, Concordant Literal New Testament). Both of these are God's positive choices for blessing.

However, God's choices are not always positive ones. He may choose an individual for a negative purpose, which Paul calls a vessel of dishonor.

Romans 9:21

Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

Pharaoh A Vessel Of Dishonor

This is really quite a remarkable statement that Paul is making. God is the Potter, we are the clay. In His sovereign power over the clay, He may mold one individual into a vessel of honor, as Paul, and another into a vessel of dishonor. This goes against the usual concept that at this present time God is seeking to save the entire world. This is not true. God chooses some for salvation at present apart from any acts or works. These are vessels of honor. Yet God chooses others as vessels of dishonor, not in vindictiveness, but to fulfill other purposes as God determines. This is His sovereign right.

The vessel of dishonor in Romans 9 below is the Egyptian Pharaoh of the Exodus. In the verses below, Paul describes God's sovereign power to mold one person into a vessel of honor and another into a vessel of dishonor, whatever suits His purpose. In either case, the human will is not a factor.

Romans 9:15-24

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

God had told Abram that the nation that would come from him, Israel, would be afflicted in servitude in a foreign land for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13). The nation that they will serve, Egypt, will be judged by God. The day eventually came when God would extricate the nation of Israel from Egyptian servitude. But God did not have in mind that Israel would simply walk out of Egypt and take up residence in the promised land of Canaan shortly thereafter.

God had the higher purpose of giving an incredible display of His power and that His name might be declared throughout the earth. To accomplish this, He purposely raised up Pharaoh as His opposition and had to harden Pharaoh's heart to maintain that opposition. In other words, God had to create His own opposition as Pharaoh was too weak on his own. If Pharaoh had refused to let Israel go on his own, God would not have needed to harden him. This hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which was God's doing, enabled Him to give the demonstration that He had planned to give all along.

Pharaoh was chosen for this task just as much as Paul was chosen to be a display of God's grace. He had no say in the matter. He was chosen as a vessel of dishonor. However, let no one think that God does not also have gracious plans for vessels of dishonor. This is a temporary condition that allows God to teach certain object lessons. This will be discussed in the next part.

Judas Was Chosen

The apostle that betrayed Jesus, Judas Iscariot, was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve.

John 6:70-71

Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.

An amazing fact of Scripture is that Judas was chosen by Jesus for the express purpose of betraying Him. Jesus knew from the beginning who it was that would betray Him (John 6:64).

Then why even choose Judas in the first place? Jesus Himself gives us the answer to this question. During the final Passover with the twelve, after He had washed their feet, He told them that an

apostle was not greater than the One Who sends them. He then said there was one among them of whom He was not speaking, referring to Judas, being aware of whom He chooses, that the Scripture may be fulfilled. Judas was chosen by Jesus to betray Him in fulfillment of Scripture.

John 13:18-19

I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

The Scripture to which Jesus was referring is Psalm 41:9. Jesus tells us that this scripture describing betrayal refers to Judas Iscariot and that it had to be fulfilled. Judas was chosen as a vessel of dishonor to accomplish this task. He had no choice in the matter as Jesus chose him for this purpose. Even then, it took possession by Satan to accomplish the task as Judas apparently could not be relied on to betray the Lord on his own.

John 13:25-27

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.

No one suspected Judas as capable of betrayal. When Jesus told the twelve that one of them would betray Him, none of them knew of whom He spoke (John 13:21-22). It actually took possession by Satan for Judas to complete the job. The Gospel of Matthew makes very clear that Judas regretted his action, returned the price of betrayal to the chief priests and elders, admitting his sin, and committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5).

Both Pharaoh and Judas were chosen by God as vessels of dishonor to accomplish the tasks that were assigned to them. In the former case, God not only wished to free Israel from servitude, but in the process to give a display of His power and a practical demonstration of what the gods of Egypt amounted to in comparison. To do so, He hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that he might oppose Him. In the latter case, the betrayal of the Lord was written in the Scriptures and had to be fulfilled.

These two vessels of dishonor were chosen by God to fulfill His purposes. They had no choice in the matter. The potter has the right over the same clay to make one vessel for honor and one vessel for dishonor (Romans 9:21). There is nothing more helpless than the clay in the hands of the potter.

If God makes vessels of dishonor in this way, it can reasonably call into question the claim of the Scriptures that God is love (1 John 4:8). This important question is addressed in the next part.

What About The Vessels Of Dishonor?

God hardened Pharaoh to oppose His stated purpose to free Israel from Egyptian bondage. He also chose Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus in order that Scriptures may be fulfilled. Both were vessels of dishonor and both had no choice in the matter. The clay has no input regarding what the potter makes (Romans 9:21), whether a vessel of honor or vessel of dishonor. What kind of vessel God makes as the Potter is entirely His prerogative.

At this point, any thinking individual must ask himself: If the vessels of dishonor are used by God to show His wrath and make His power known and such vessels are fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22), how can God possibly be a God of love? The vessels of dishonor are helpless clay in the hands of the Great Potter. In fact, the vessels of honor are also helpless clay. The purpose of the vessels of honor is that God "*might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory*" (Romans 9:23).

Yet how is that fair to the vessels of dishonor, who are no worse or better than the vessels of honor? The vessels of dishonor could just as easily have been vessels of honor and vice versa, as the Great Potter determines.

The Justification of All Mankind

No one should infer that being a vessel of dishonor is anything more than a temporary state in God's eyes. In the very same epistle that speaks of vessels of honor and dishonor, the Apostle Paul teaches us that the great doctrine of justification, a complete acquittal from all sin, is a gift that will be applied, in due time, not just to vessels of honor, those who are chosen, but to all mankind, without exception. It is God's universal gift to all mankind. A vessel of dishonor is not permanent, but a temporary state through which God accomplishes certain purposes.

All have sinned, both vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor (Romans 3:23). This is due to our mortality, which all mankind inherited from Adam, the progenitor of the race.

Romans 5:12 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned ---

Adam's act of sinning resulted in death, or mortality, being passed through to the entire human race, all mankind. Not a single member of the human race has any choice in the matter. Due to inheriting mortality, all are sinners. Our mortality is something "*on which all sinned*". All mankind is condemned because of Adam's sin.

Yet God has graciously remedied this dire situation through the obedience of Christ. Adam's one offense is more than counteracted through the one act of Christ.

Romans 5:18-19 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Consequently, then, as it was through one offense for all mankind for condemnation, thus also it is through one just award for all mankind for life's justifying. For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the One, the many shall be constituted just.

Let's be clear about what Paul is saying and not interpret this to suit a particular theological doctrine. Because of Adam's one offense, all mankind was condemned. There are no exceptions to this. The entire human race, all mankind, was condemned. Thus also, through one just award, the result of Christ's obedience, all mankind will receive the justification of life. In the same way that through the disobedience of the one man, Adam, the many (all mankind) were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the One Man, Christ, the many (all mankind) shall be constituted just. There are no exceptions to all mankind being constituted sinners, and there are no exceptions to all mankind being constituted just. Each of these is accomplished through the one act of Adam and Christ, respectively.

The justification of all mankind will not be accepted by anyone who clings to Christian orthodoxy. But what is more important --- Christian orthodoxy or the Scriptures?

These wonderful passages in Romans demonstrate that God has not forgotten the unchosen. All that He provides to His chosen at the present time will also eventually be provided to those who are not presently chosen. To more fully understand the time periods during which God is effecting His purpose, please read *God's Time Periods* by HeraldTheWord.com.

Why Does God Now Only Choose Some?

What is God's purpose in only choosing some for salvation during this present age? Why does He not now choose all for salvation?

We learned in Part 2 that it is God's purpose to eventually bless all nations through the chosen nation of Israel. This cannot happen until the return of Christ, when Israel becomes the predominant nation under Messiah and the conduit of blessing to all other nations.

Similarly, the church, which Paul calls the body of Christ, whose members are explicitly chosen by God and placed in that body (1 Corinthians 12:27, Concordant Literal New Testament), has an even more glorious purpose. That purpose is stated by Paul to be the complement of Christ, who is completing the all in all. In Ephesians 1:20-21 (Concordant Literal New Testament) Paul says that God roused Christ from the dead, sat Him at His (God's) right hand among the celestials, over every authority and power and every name and ...

subjects all under His feet, and gives Him, as Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23, Concordant Literal New Testament)

God the Father will subject all under the feet of His Christ and gives Him (Christ) as Head over all to the ecclesia, which is the church, His body. Christ will complete the all in all, and the ecclesia is Christ's complement in completing the all in all.

But what does it mean to be "completing the all in all"?

God Has A Goal

God has an ultimate goal for His creation. That goal is explicitly stated nowhere else in the Scriptures except by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:20-28 (Concordant Literal New Testament):

(Yet now Christ has been roused from among the dead, the Firstfruit of those who are reposing. For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. (verses 20-21)

Paul insists that Christ has been roused from the dead and that He is the Firstfruit of those who are reposing. Here he uses the figure of repose, or sleep, for those who are dead. We will learn in the verses that follow that Christ is the Firstfruit of those reposing of all mankind, not just believers. Death came through Adam, the resurrection of the dead comes through Christ.

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified. (verse 22)

Death passed through into all mankind through the one act of Adam (Romans 5:12). Therefore, in Adam, all mankind is dying, or subject to death. Mankind's dying state eventually ends in death. The only exception to this among mankind are believers who are alive at the return of Christ (I Thessalonians 4:17).

In the same way that in Adam all are dying, thus also in Christ all shall be vivified. Vivification, as we shall see, is making alive beyond the reach of death, immortality. Adam was the channel through which all mankind are dying. Christ will be the channel through which all mankind will be vivified. Paul does not say that only those in Christ, or believers, are vivified. He says that in Christ all will be vivified in the same way that in Adam all are dying.

Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet. Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him (verses 23-27)

God will vivify all mankind. But He does not do so all at once. Mankind is divided into three classes relative to vivification. First, Christ was vivified at His resurrection. He is the Firstfruit, i.e. He is the first to be vivified as a Man and is the example for all that follow. What is true of Christ is true of all the rest.

Second, all those who are Christ's are vivified in His presence. This happens at the return of Christ and includes the saints of Israel as well as the church, or the ecclesia, which is His body.

Finally, the balance of mankind, the third class, is vivified at that future point in time called the consummation. The consummation is described as the time when Christ gives up the kingdom to God the Father, all sovereignty and authority are nullified, all are subject to Christ, and, finally, death is abolished as the last enemy. So how do we know that the balance of mankind is vivified at the consummation? Because at that point death will be abolished.

This third class was not Christ's at the time the second class was vivified, otherwise they would have been vivified also. Instead they are vivified at the consummation and are justified from all sin as was described above in the discussion on universal justification. We will also learn in the next part that the entire universe will become reconciled to God at the consummation. This is why it is called the consummation. God will have reached His final goal as far as the Scriptures are concerned.

Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.) (verse 28)

Remember that the church, or ecclesia, is Christ's complement in completing the all in all. So now we arrive at the answer about what it means to be "*completing the all in all*" in Ephesians 1:22-23. At the consummation, all will have been subjected to Christ, Who in turn will become subject to God the Father, Who has subjected all to Christ. Death will have been abolished and there will no other authority than that of the Father, as all other sovereignty and authority will have been nullified. The point of all of this is that "*God may be All in all*".

The church is the complement of Christ, Who is the One completing the "*all in all*" (Ephesians 1:22-23, Concordant Literal New Testament), or that future time when, at the consummation, God will finally be All in all. The "*all in all*" is when God will be all in all His creation. All mankind will be finally justified and vivified. God cannot be All in all without death being abolished and all mankind receiving immortality. The church will complement Christ in accomplishing this marvelous goal

During the ages to come, beginning at the return of Christ, only the chosen enjoy immortality and incorruptibility (I Corinthians 15:54-55). These ages would be the coming thousand-year reign of Messiah (Revelation 20:6) and the new heavens and earth that follow (Revelation 21:1). During these periods of time, only the chosen receive immortality, whether the saints in Israel or the body of Christ, the church. The unchosen pass through the judgment of the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15).

Yet God has not forgotten the unchosen. After all, the unchosen are no better or worse than the chosen. God finally accomplishes His stated goal at the consummation, when all are subject to God, sin and evil are discarded, and death is abolished by the vivification of all the unchosen. At that time, the advantage of the chosen disappears and all receive the same immortality and are in fellowship with God. God will be All in all. God is truly the God of love that He says He is (1 John 4:8).

Conclusion

God's purpose in choosing some in this present age and not others is that the chosen may be a blessing to others in bringing them to God. In the case of Israel, it was God's promise to Abraham He would make him into a great nation and that consequently would bless all nations (Genesis 12:2-3). This blessing awaits the future one-thousand year reign of Messiah at the return of Christ. At that time, Israel will be the predominant nation and God's ambassadors to all nations.

As we learned in a previous part, the church has the even greater role of being the complement of Christ, Who is completing the all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23). Eventually, God will be all in all His creation, not just the chosen. The church complements the One, Christ, Who will bring this to fruition (I Corinthians 15:28). At the same time, the church, in the ages to come, will be a display of God's transcendent grace (Ephesians 2:7, Concordant Literal New Testament).

It should be noted regarding the church, the body of Christ, that no one actually joins that body on their own. This can't be emphasized enough. The members are placed there by God according to His sovereign will (I Corinthians 12:27, Concordant Literal New Testament). God designated the members of Christ's body beforehand, before they were even called.

Romans 8:30 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

Now whom He designates beforehand, these He calls also, and whom He calls, these He justifies also; now whom He justifies, these He glorifies also.

The path for the members of Christ's body is being designated beforehand, called, justified, and, finally, glorified. All of this is entirely of God.

It should also be noted that the body of Christ transcends any Christian denominations. It consists of God's chosen ones (Romans 8:33) without regard to any denomination.

Yet for God to be All in all demands that He also be reconciled to all His creation, both the heavens and the earth. This is accomplished only through the blood of the cross of Christ:

Colossians 1:18-20 (Concordant Literal New Testament)

And He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens.

Christ is the Head of the body, the ecclesia (church), which delights to dwell in Him. Christ, through the blood of His cross, will reconcile all to God the Father, whether those in the heavens or those on the earth. There will come a time when there will be a complete, universal

reconciliation to God. There will be no estrangement between God and His creatures anywhere in the universe, not on earth, and not in the heavens. Only thus can God be all in all.

It is God's sovereign privilege to choose some and not others in the accomplishment of His purposes. God has not chosen some due to some special merit that the unchosen did not have. The call of the chosen is entirely by God's grace without any acts to merit being chosen (II Timothy 1:9-11).

Likewise the salvation of the unchosen at the consummation, when they are justified, vivified, and reconciled, is entirely by God's grace. If the chosen are saved by grace, certainly the unchosen are saved by grace as well. In the end, it is through the cross of Christ that God, in His love, will reconcile the entire universe to Himself, both those in the heavens and humanity on the earth.

In spite of God's plain statements in the Scriptures, this description of the consummation provided by Paul will not be accepted by orthodoxy. False ideas of God's ultimate purpose have been absorbed into Christianity to the extent that few are able to accept God's plain statements regarding His ultimate purpose. The reader should therefore search the Scriptures himself, and, by God's grace, come to an understanding of God's marvelous purpose, not only for humanity, but for the entire creation.