

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on July 11, 2021:**

"Universally Chosen (Ephesians 1:3-14)"

[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman on Zoom shows us that through this passage of scripture, Paul is sharing with us God's universal plan of salvation for all, which is so encouraging.]

Introduction:

- A key to interpreting scripture is to know that some passages are written universally, and some passages are written personally. That has implications for this passage.
- In the Greek, this passage is one sentence. In it, Paul starts to share from the spirit everything about God, everything about humanity, from the very beginning, the past, the present, and the future, all encompassed in these eleven verses.
- When scripture speaks to a universal notion, we sometimes call that objective—that's from God's point of view, how does he view humanity and our relationship with him?
- When scriptures speak to personal or we might say subjective, it deals with whether or not we have experienced or believed or accepted some of those universal truths that God has put out there.
- And so, we could read two different scriptures that seem to completely discredit or conflict with each other, and we know that scripture is in harmony, so we have to understand why and how.
- When we see something written universally, it applies to all humanity.
- And when we see a scripture that's written personally, it applies to those who have not accepted, believed, participated in, or experienced all of the love and promises that God has to offer.
- In these verses, we'll see both universal and personal language.
- These scriptures have every implication of where we're headed, where our kids are headed, our desires.
- Most want all of humanity in heaven as well as family and friends, which could be labeled "desiring universalists" or "hopeful universalists."
- Let's see what Paul has to say. Within this passage—and it's huge—we have what we could call the doctrines of election, of predestination, of adoption, and redemption.
- Commentator Paul Young, the author of *The Shack*, said of this passage, "Even though he bookends his intro with a personal comment to the saints at Ephesus [that would be personal language] and then in verse 12 as first fruits, the bookends are personal, but everything in between is universal (cosmos encompassing). Otherwise, this whole

section would only apply to the saints in Ephesus, and only then to the faithful of those saints, and only to those first trusted, and so not you and me. Ephesians 1:3-11 is a grand and cosmic encompassing declaration, a hymn of sorts that includes us all.

- Most commentators would conclude that this passage applies to believers, and from a subjective personal standpoint, that would be absolutely true. But in saying that, they are leaving out the not-yet believers.
- If we think it through, we would have to say that Jesus died for only believers. The only universally chosen were just believers. That negates a lot of grace, and that negates a lot of other passages that are universally directed.
- As we go through the passage, think about what problems this presents if it only applies to believers, and it doesn't apply to not-yet believers. Think about who was implied in God's plan from the very beginning. Was that all of humanity, or was it just those who believed?

Ephesians 1:3 (NASB), Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

- Being universally chosen begins with God the Father. It wasn't a case where God the Father is, so to speak, the bad cop, and Jesus comes and takes away this penalty that the Father has to have because he is holy and sovereign. No, it begins with God the Father.
- He has blessed US with EVERY spiritual blessing. We are, right now, seated in the heavenly places, because we've been chosen, and we've responded. If we are blameless, is there any reason at all for fear, shame, guilt, or doubt? There's none!
- And what's the motivation here? Why would God do this? It was his plan from the very beginning. It was his goal, and it was motivated out of love.

In love 5) He predestined us to adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved.

- He predestined us according to the good pleasure of his will... there's no "bad cop" language here, absolutely none!

7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our wrongdoings, according to the riches of His grace 8) which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight 9) He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He set forth in Him, 10) regarding His plan of the fullness of the times, to bring all things together in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

- Here, Paul is speaking about the past, and the present—the present is our adoption, and then he's going to move to the future, too. So, salvation is all-encompassing here.

- The forgiveness of sin is a universal concept. It applies to all, whether or not we personally believe that or have accepted that. We are forgiven. All of humanity has been forgiven.
- Whether they experience that or not is going to make a difference in their lives. If you don't live a life where you know that you've been forgiven, at the cross, from the foundation, then you won't experience that. And so, the not-yet believer is at a disadvantage.
- That's why we have the challenge of sharing the gospel with those who will listen, to let them know who they are.
- It's not of anything we have done. It's all out of his love and desire for his children, all of his creation. He LAVISHED this upon us—there was no scarcity! This was good! (According to his good pleasure.) It was good for God the Father, who directed it. It was good for Jesus Christ to make it happen. It was good for the Holy Spirit to help us believe it.
- His plan was to bring ALL things together in Christ. Things in the heavens, and things on the earth. Does he say his plan was to bring SOME things together, a few things together, most things together, almost all things together? No! In the fullness of time, Jesus will gather all things into himself, both in heaven and in earth, and he'll give it all back to his father.

11) In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things in accordance with the plan of His will, 12) to the end that we who were the first to hope in the Christ would be to the praise of His glory. 13) In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of the promise, 14) who is a first installment of our inheritance, in regard to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- Now, if because of our past views or beliefs, if any of you here, as believers, still think that this might happen, this may happen, I would say that it's short or misguided thinking.
- Paul, in this passage, has shown us the why, the how, and the who, and it means every one of us. Moreover, it means all of our friends, our neighbors, our work associates, our family. Whether or not they have a relationship with God doesn't matter. Everyone is included in God's love.
- But if you ask people in the street, you don't get a lot of positive answers. That's where we come in, as first fruits, to be able to share that love. To be able to let people know who they are and what really matters.
- There should be no doubt. The gospel is unbelievably good news! There's nothing for us to do except believe and then participate. And belief can sometimes be a hard thing for some—why would someone lavish such love on us when we may never have experienced that physically, even from our own parents. We've got a God and Father that desired to do that from before you and I were even here or a thought.

- That's what Paul is sharing with us in this Gospel. And no matter what our present circumstances are—we could be living in an absolute dung storm, not knowing what tomorrow's going to bring, but that's temporal—this is eternal! This is who we really are! This is universal! This is how God sees us! The kind of love God has for us, even though we know temporally we don't deserve it.
- It's not a matter of deserving. There's nothing we can do on our own. That's the beauty of grace! That's the beauty of the Gospel! That's the beauty of what Paul is saying right here, not only to the Ephesian church (because he wrote it first to them) but to all of us.
- Now that has some implications in terms of being universally chosen. It has some implications for universal salvation. Calvin and others chose limited atonement (that Christ died only for the sins of the elect) and don't believe that God chose everyone.
- And so, let's ask ourselves three things: (1) How many believe that God is omnipotent, meaning all powerful and can do anything he chooses to? (2) How many believe God is omniscient, that he knows everything from beginning to end and presently speaking? (3) Finally, how many believe God is omnibenevolent, that he loves all and wants to best for all?
- Let's apply that to salvation. You've heard me say many times that God does not force his love on anyone. We freely choose that, because forced love is no love at all. So that means those that are included in heaven or ultimately will be in heaven, those that choose will freely choose.
- First of all, If God is omnipotent, and all powerful, then that means he could cause all to freely choose.
- Secondly, if God is all knowing, then he would know how to cause all to freely choose.
- Third, if God is omnibenevolent, or loves all, he would want all to freely choose Christ.
- So, if we see \Rightarrow God could cause, know how, and want all to freely choose, then, logically, God will cause all to do so. That is the equation of the hopeful universalist. You don't have to be a hopeful universalist.
- Here's where Calvin got it wrong. He denied no. 3. He said that God did not WANT all to be saved, and by not wanting, he could assign those to hell, and it would be okay.
- Can you see anything in there where God would not want to save all, and God does not show his love for everyone? That's why we have hope!
- Now, our church does not believe in universalism, but we can have hope in our heart that all will be there. We can know that God has included all in his love and that final choice really isn't our choice at all. Did any of you choose to love God? Did any of you choose to be saved?
- This universal passage that Paul has shared gives us great hope. It defines who we are and how much God loves us, but it gives us hope for those around us.

- Timothy said, in 1 Tim. 2:4 God wants all to be saved. That's his heart. 1 Peter says God wants no one to perish, and in Matthew 18 from Jesus's words, he does not want anyone to face persecution and hell.
- We serve a loving God. We're included in a loving God. All of humanity is included, but they don't know it, and it's our role and our calling as a first fruit to share that, first with our family and those around us, those that we influence, and those primarily that the Holy Spirit draws to us. We're not called to go out on the street and preach with a bullhorn. But as I sense the Holy Spirit working with someone that I know, I feel free to share that Gospel and tap into it. And I hope that all of you do, too.
- We serve such a loving, amazing God, and the ironic thing is that we didn't have a thing to do with it, and thank God for that! It's out of his love. He's done it all.

[Closing prayer]

Special Announcement

We do have a date for reopening, and that will be August 1. I have put together a reopening team to discuss the details. We will send out a member letter letting everybody know that. All those wishing to attend services will have to fill out a one-time waiver.