Ephesians

Lesson One

**Intro: Eph. 1:1-2**

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” Paul follows the convention of his time by beginning with an identification of himself, so that the readers would know who was writing to them. Paul varies his openings slightly, but he did use this same phrase on other occasions. E.g., 2 Cor. 1:1, Col. 1:1. It is humble and audacious. Paul claims no social status or merit of his own, even though he possessed credentials important in his day—Roman citizenship, enrolled member of the tribe of Benjamin, Pharisaical education, and a key founder of the Ephesian church. Paul does, however, claim to be an “apostle,” i.e., one who is sent like an emissary or ambassador, of Jesus. Paul identifies Jesus as “Christ,” meaning the Messianic ruler predicted in OT passages like 2 Sam. 7:11-16 and Psalm 2. Paul further claims that he is an emissary of Jesus the Messiah “by the will of God,” i.e., God—the LORD revealed in the OT—chose to make Paul an emissary of Jesus. It is not a title or office Paul co-opted for himself.

Paul’s claim is remarkable in many ways. Given all that OT says about the authority given to the Messiah, it is remarkable to seriously claim that any human is the Messiah. If one gets past that, and assumes Jesus does possess that kind of authority, it is remarkable for Paul to claim that God—the creator of the universe--personally chose Paul to be the Messiah’s emissary.

Paul is probably using “apostle” in multiple senses. That term was used of believers like Barnabas and Paul called to spread the good news about Jesus. (Acts 13:2-3, 14:4, 14.) But more narrowly it referred to the remaining members of the original 12 Disciples and a few others (i.e., Matthias, James the brother of Jesus), who knew Jesus personally and were specially commissioned to testify about Jesus and exercise authority among Jesus’ followers. (Acts 1:8, 21-22.) Although there is no evidence Paul knew Jesus personally before Jesus’s crucifixion, Paul nevertheless claimed to be part of this more narrow group through the grace of God “as one abnormally born.” (1 Cor. 15:7-10.) Paul’s claim relied on the commission the resurrected Jesus issued directly to Paul on the road to Damascus, in which Jesus designated Paul as “witness” for and about Jesus just as the original apostles were designated witnesses. (Acts 26:12-18.) This passage indicates Paul was an eyewitness of Jesus’s bodily appearance on the road to Damascus, and that Paul would receive direct revelation from Jesus after that encounter. Paul thus was similar to the original 12 Disciples in that he did not have to rely on hearing about Jesus from other people. (Gal. 1:12.) It is remarkable how Paul and the other early church leaders consistently used their authority to draw attention to Jesus rather than themselves. It distinguishes the early church from modern cults.

BTW, scholars believe Paul is wrote this letter circa 61-62 AD during his first imprisonment in Rome. Paul will refer to his imprisonment later in the letter, but does not mention it in his greeting.

“To the holy ones/saints in Ephesus, that is those who believe in Christ Jesus.” Again following convention, Paul identifies his recipients. “Holy one,” often translated as “saint,” was a common term for those who believed in Jesus, and communicates that God grants Jesus’ holiness or righteousness to Jesus’ followers and that such followers are then properly prepared or set apart for God’s service. Paul is writing to believers in Ephesus, which probably meant multiple small assemblies or house churches in and around Ephesus. Ephesus was located on the western coast of the Roman province of Asia (now located in Turkey). It was a provincial capital, had a small harbor, and was the western terminus of a long highway going approx. 1,700 mile east to the city of Susa (now located in Iran). These advantages made it one of the largest and most economically significant cities in the Roman empire, with an estimated population of 200,000 to 250,000. It also possessed a temple to the Greek goddess Artemis that was considered a wonder of the ancient world and may have been the largest building known to the people of the Roman Empire. This supported tourism and trade in religious figures. Ephesus also appears to have had a large trade in other magical items. It also had a Jewish synagogue. (Acts 19:8.)

Acts indicates that Paul was the instrument through which Ephesian believers first received the Holy Spirit, and that Paul performed many extraordinary miracles there, an important source of credibility for Paul’s incredible claims about Jesus. (Acts. 19:3-12.) Paul likely expected that this letter would be circulated and read aloud in the various congregations in Ephesus and its surrounding area.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul uses this phrase in other introductions. (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Phil 1:2, 2 Thess. 1:2.) Letters in Paul’s day often began with a short expression of well-wishes for the recipients that also served as a polite greeting and Paul follows this convention. Pagan letters, however, might begin with a wish for good physical health or a reference to a Greek or Roman deity. Paul wishes the spiritual blessings of grace and peace for his readers. Grace includes unmerited favor and divine enablement or empowerment to be and do good. Peace is the absence of conflict but also can include things that flow from a sustained absence of conflict, such as well-being and prosperity. Moreover, the source of these blessings is “God our Father.”

We are used to thinking of God as a triune being and referring to the first person of the trinity as “God the Father.” But the OT did not emphasize the concept of God as father. Jesus used this figure to describe the LORD’s relationship with Jesus and his followers. (Matt. 6:9, 23:9; Mark 14:36.) Part of the good news about Jesus was that his followers could have a new level of intimacy with God, that Paul described as a spirit of sonship. (Rom. 8:13-18.) This greeting is remarkably warm and comforting. It is also audacious. It is a remarkable thing for Paul to claim to describe the OT LORD as the father of Paul and the Ephesians and to offer grace and peace from the OT LORD to the Ephesians.

The source of the grace and peace is not just God/the OT LORD. It is THE Lord Jesus Christ. The word “lord” has a broad range of meaning and can mean something like “sir.” When used as a title for Jesus, though, Paul means that God/the OT LORD has given complete authority over the earth to Jesus. (1 Cor. 15:24-28.) Paul’s view is that heavenly blessings from God/the OT LORD are dispensed through Jesus.

**Eph. 1:3-14 Praising God/the incredibly glorious status and future of Jesus’s followers**

At 1:3, Paul breaks from his normal practice of following his greeting with a statement of thanksgiving for the recipients. Instead, Paul delays the thanksgiving for the recipients to devote 12 verses/202 words to a sustained and passionate statement of praise (eulogy) to the triune God. Paul’s choice allows him to not only praise God but also launch the letter’s central theme of the glorious current status and glorious future awaiting the community of Jesus’s followers. As we work our way through these verses, it is helpful to remember that Paul was in prison when he wrote this incredible statement, so we should fight any tendency to allow depressing worldly circumstances to make us doubt the truth of these verses.

Paul begins by praising “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This phrase portrays God the Father/the first person of the trinity as the God and Father of Jesus. Other verses clarify that Jesus always existed and the triune God shares one divine nature, so “father” is just a metaphor. (John 1:1, Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16-17. Yet, the members of this triune being are sufficiently distinct that Paul can describes God the Father as Jesus’s God and father. Jesus used the same sort of language as well. (John 13:31-32, 14:1.) Paul

Paul literally says “Blessed is” God the Father. In this context, blessed means worthy of praise.

The reason Paul gives for blessing/praising God the Father is that He has blessed (which in this context means given or bestowed) the community of Christ’s followers with “every spiritual blessing” “in the heavenly realms” “in Christ.” This thought functions as a topic sentence or summary of verses 4-14.

“every spiritual blessing.” This phrase emphasizes that God has bestowed the complete range of spiritual blessings on Christ’s followers. That Paul could write this from prison shows that spiritual blessings are distinct from worldly or physical blessings. As we will see, however, spiritual blessings ultimately have physical consequences, but Paul’s example shows we should not be surprised by temporary worldly set backs.

“in the heavenly realms.” This phrase further emphasizes that the spiritual nature and divine source of the blessings believers currently possess. This is disappointing in the sense that our flesh craves worldly blessings. But it may help to reflect on the incorruptible and secure nature of heavenly blessings in contrast to the fleeting nature of the world’s blessings. (Matt. 6:19-21.)

“in Christ.” In this context, this little phrase emphasizes that the spiritual blessings are bestowed through believers’ identification with, or incorporation into, Christ. As Paul makes clear in other verses, the reason God can bestow every spiritual blessing on believers is not because of any merit in ourselves but because Christ fulfilled the law and is able to claim full OT covenant blessings. (Gal. 3:26-29.)

In short, Paul can praise God the Father from Paul’s Roman prison cell because, through Christ, God the Father has bestowed the full range heavenly, spiritual blessings on Paul and his readers.

 **Eph. 1:4-6: the spiritual blessing of being chosen by God the Father**

Scholars have spent a LOT of effort trying to find complicated structures in verses 1:4-14. Other commentators argue the structure is more loose, like a spoken prayer rather than a poem. I found their view more persuasive—the repetition and circularity of the passage seem more like a spontaneous Psalm or prayer than a carefully structured theological essay. Paul’s goal is to list some of the spiritual blessings that make God praiseworthy, using the trinity as a rough framework.

“For He/God the Father chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before him.” The first spiritual benefit Paul mentions that he and his readers were chosen by God the Father to be holy and blameless. That God the Father made this choice of His own accord is emphasized by its timing: before the world was founded or made. Genesis 1 takes as given that God pre-existed the material universe. Other things/decision that the Bible says occurred or existed before creation of the material universe include: God the Father’s love for Jesus (John 17:24); and God the Father’s knowledge of Jesus’s role in salvation.

“in him” refers to Lord Jesus Christ in 1:2. Here, Paul seems to be emphasizing that God the Father’s choice to save certain believers occurs in connection with or through Christ and his redemptive work.

“that we might be holy and blameless before him.” Here, him is God the Father. The result of God the Father’s choice is that a person becomes holy and blameless in God’s sight. As noted, the means of this transformation is the person’s connection with Christ. The value of this spiritual benefit cannot be overstated. Everyone’s ultimate problem is that they are an imperfect, flawed, mortal creature who will die and stand before a holy creator to give an account for their actions. (Hebrews 9:27; Rev. 20:11-12.) To be chosen by God to be seen as holy and blameless in that moment has infinite value.

“in love.” This little phrase appears either at the end of verse 4 or the beginning of verse 5. Scholars and translators cannot agree what it modifies. Some think love describes God the Father’s motive for choosing believers in verse 4. Some think it is an additional descriptor of the result of God the Father’s choice, i.e., that believers might be “holy and blameless before him in love.” The idea is that believers would be holy and blameless in a relational sense because they act with selfless love, especially toward other believers. Last, some think love describes God’s motive for predestining believers in verse 5. Since predestination is similar to election, there is not much practical difference between the first and third views. The second view seems awkward, but supposedly has a strong case based on where the phrase appears in the Greek text. Part of the difficulty is that both outcomes are true. Logically, the only motive for God bestowing this spiritual benefit on any person is love—He has nothing to gain from the transaction. But it is also true that the goal of salvation includes acting with love toward others as part of being holy and blameless. (1 Thess. 3:12-13.) My favorite translations are split, so I really don’t know the right answer, but the first or third view seem more appealing to me than the second.

“having predestined us to adoption as sons.” “Predestined” means determined beforehand, so this phrase is parallel to 1:4 and is saying that God the Father determined before creation to adopt Paul and his readers as sons. This reinforces the assertion in 1:4 that God the Father chooses to bestow salvation on believers. “adoption and sonship,” i.e., becoming part of God the Father’s family, are an additional aspect of salvation. The Roman doctrine of adoption was powerful and encompassed both release from any and all duties between the biological father and child and acquisition of full rights and duties between the adopted child and father. Roman fathers had enormous rights over and responsibilities to their children, including the duty of protection. To be brought under the protection of the creator of the universe is an awesome benefit. (Rom. 8:31.)

“through Jesus Christ to himself.” Just as election occurs in connection with Christ’s redeeming work, so the means of our adoption into the family of God the Father is through Jesus Christ’s redeeming work.

“according to the good pleasure of his will.” “good pleasure” conveys that God the Father is happy/pleased to bestow the benefit of adoption on Christ’s followers, which calls to mind the end of the prodigal son parable. “will” conveys that God the Father chooses to adopt Christ’s follower of his own volition; it is not forced by anyone else. This clause emphasizes that God the Father happily and freely chooses to adopt believers.

“to the praise of the glory of his grace.” The clause conveys that one purpose of graciously bestowing the spiritual benefits of holiness, blamelessness, and adoption is to provoke praise for God the Father’s essential nature, especially his grace. In this context, “glory” refers to essential nature.

“which grace he has bestowed on us in the beloved one.” This phrase re-emphasizes that these spiritual benefits are an unmerited favor bestowed on Paul and his readers through “the beloved one,” which here means Jesus. It is unusual for Paul to use this phrase; it sounds like something John would say. The phrase also begins a transition toward emphasizing Jesus’s role in salvation.

**Eph. 1:7-12 spiritual blessings of forgiveness and redemption obtained through Christ**

“in whom we have redemption.” “In whom” refers back to Jesus, the beloved one. “redemption” conveys being set free, often by payment of a price or ransom.

“through his blood” The means (or payment) of the redemption was Christ’s blood. Referring to his blood seems like an allusion to the sacrificial system and implies that Christ’s death was a sacrifice he made on our behalf.

“the forgiveness of sins.” “forgiveness” means release or cancellation. “sins” means willful acts contrary to God’s holiness. This phrase helps specify the type of redemption obtained by Christ’s sacrificial death as release from the bondage caused by our sins. So another spiritual benefit is that, through Christ’s death, the price of Christ’s followers’ sins has been cancelled or forgiven and they have been redeemed.

“according to the wealth of his grace.” The word “wealth” connotes abundant riches. The phrase implies God the Father expended/Christ provided a huge amount of grace to cancel our sin.

“which he lavished on us.” “lavished” means to provide an abundance of, and further supporting the huge amount of grace involved in redemption.

“with all/every kind of wisdom and discernment.” Along with, or as part of, the grace lavished on believers comes every type of wisdom and discernment. This is consistent with the idea that grace is not just unmerited favor but also enablement.

“having made known to us the mystery of his will.” One example of the wisdom and discernment graciously bestowed to believers is the revealing the “mystery” of God’s will. Paul uses “mystery” to mean something previously hidden to humans but known to God that God intended to do.

“according to his good pleasure.” God was happy to reveal his will to believers; this wisdom or insight is not something he gave begrudgingly.

“which he purposed in him.” The mystery revealed, or wisdom bestowed, is God the Father’s purpose in Jesus. This implies that revelation/grace from God was needed to discern God the Father’s plan to provide redemption through Christ. This is certainly consistent with the gospels, where even Jesus’s disciples resist the idea of his crucifixion until after his resurrection. (Mark 8:27-33.)

“in the administration of the fullness of the times.” This phrase, and the material following it, give more information about God’s purpose in Christ. This phrase relates to timing and indicates God’s purpose in Christ will be carried out when the time is right or ripe. This implies that God the Father’s purpose in Christ is not yet been completely fulfilled, but it will be when the time is full, right, or ripe.

“to unite under one head all things in Christ.” God’s purpose in Christ is not just to provide redemption for Christ’s followers, but to unite all things under the messiah’s headship. The previous phrase indicates this uniting will be completed at the proper time, i.e., it was not yet complete when Paul wrote Ephesians.

“the things in heaven and earth in him.” The phrase explains what Paul means when he says “all things” will be united under Christ’s headship, and it clarifies that “all things” includes all creation, heaven and earth. Of course, to some extent, the ascension indicates that Jesus is at the right hand of God and so has already been recognized by God the Father as the rightful head of creation. But God the Father has not yet required all creation to recognize Jesus’s authority—that will be carried out at the proper time.

So, one example of the wisdom bestowed on believers is the revelation that God the Father will make Jesus Christ head over all creation.

“in whom we were also made a heritage.” This phrase conveys that believers are part of the inheritance or heritage that God the Father is uniting under Christ’s headship.

“having been predestined according to the purpose of the one who is working all things.” This phrase again emphasizes that Paul and his readers’ status as an inheritance of Christ was predestined or determined beforehand according to the purpose of the one who is working out all things, i.e., in this context everything on heaven and earth.

“according to the counsel of his will.” “counsel” means deliberation, so this phrase asserts that God the Father is working out all things on heaven and earth in accordance with how He has determined that they should work out after the exercise of careful deliberation.

“in order that we might be to the praise of his glory.” Paul and his readers were made part of Christ’s heritage or inheritance to provoke praise for God’s gift of redemption in Christ. It is parallel to the phrase in v.6 talking about how the blessings in verses 3-6 were to provoke praise for God the Father.

“the ones who already hoped in Christ.” Figuring out what this phrase means depends on how one interprets the shift between “we” in 1:12 and “you” in 1:13. Up to this point in the passage, Paul has been using “we” to mean him and his readers, who he assumes to share his faith in Jesus. If Paul is still using “we” in that sense, he is saying that those of us who already had faith in Christ when Paul wrote the epistle might be included in Christ’s inheritance to provoke praise for God the Father.

**Eph. 1:13-14: the spiritual blessing of being sealed by the Holy Spirit**

“in whom you also.” The “whom” refers back to “Christ” but the phrase looks ahead to the discussion of sealing. “You” means Paul’s readers, who he assumes to be followers of Jesus. Some scholars argue for a distinction between Jewish believers in verse 13 and gentile believers in verse 14, but I do not see anything in this passage suggesting such a distinction.

“having heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation.” Paul asserts that the message he told the Ephesians about Jesus (i.e., the word or messag) was true, and that its contents are good news that bring salvation.

“in whom have also believed.” The Ephesians did not just listen to Paul’s message; they believed it. The “in whom” again looks back to Christ and forward to the sealing, and implies that in Christ is location or sphere where the sealing occurs.

“you were sealed.” This is the main verb. Paul thus is saying that when the Ephesians heard his message and believed, they were sealed in Christ. “Sealed” likely refers to a sign of ownership. The previous clauses indicate this sealing occurs at the moment of conversion.

“with the Holy Spirit of promise.” This phrase indicates the Holy Spirit is the means or instrument of the seal. The Holy Spirit is described as “promised.” This likely refers to OT passages predicting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Eze. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32) as well as Jesus’s promise that he would send the Holy Spirit (John 15:26 and 16:12-15; Acts 1:5.) Some commentators view sealing as a ministry of the Holy Spirit distinct from baptism or indwelling in which the Holy Spirit marks the believer as belonging to God. To me, that sounds pretty similar to baptism of the Holy Spirit, which creates an identification of the believer with Christ that makes the believer part of Christ’s community.

“who is the initial installment of our inheritance.” “initial installment” is a word similar to down payment carrying the implication that the remaining payment(s) will be made. “earnest money” or “deposit” also work as translations.

“until the redemption of the purchased possession.” The context of the passage indicates believers are the purchased possession. This description of the Holy Spirit indicates that the Holy Spirit’s presence in believers’ lives is the first portion of believers’ inheritance and guarantees that God the Father will complete the redemption process that transforms believers from fallen citizens of the world to holy and blameless members of God’s family.

“to the praise of his glory.” God is to be praised for the spiritual benefit of being sealed with the Holy Spirit.

**The Big Picture**

So, despite being in prison, Paul says that God the Father is praiseworthy because he has bestowed every type of heavenly, spiritual blessing in Christ on Paul and his readers, including:

 --God the Father’s selection of believers to be holy and blameless in Christ

 --God the Father’s adoption of believers as family through Christ

 --Redemption and forgiveness through Christ’s sacrificial death

 --Abundant grace, including the revelation of God the Father’s plan to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ’s headship in due time

 --Being chosen by God the Father, who works everything in accordance with his will, to be part of Christ’s inheritance

 --Being sealed with the Holy Spirit as a sign/guarantee that believers will receive all the promised spiritual benefits

**Application: The Problem with Corporate Vision Statements**

American businesses (and churches) tend to have mission and vision statements. Mission statements describe what the business is supposed to be doing. Vision statements describe what the business ultimately hopes to become or achieve. Vision statements are supposed to inspire employees to be passionate about their mission. I submit that most corporate vision statements fail. For example, some corporate visions are too trivial or boring to inspire anyone:

To deliver top-tier financial performance over the long term by integrating sustainability into our business strategy, leaving a positive imprint on society and the environment.

BTW, this company had since revised this statement (yeah, it has . . . .) Of course, it’s hard to write a good vision statement if what the business is trying to become is boring, trivial, and/or harmful.

There are better ones:

A world where everyone has a decent place to live.

But even the good corporate vision statements have problems. Making a business’s vision statement inspiring tends to make it less realistic, and people generally don’t want to devote much effort to something that seems like pie-in-the sky. This is why you’re going to hear the word “electability” a lot during the next year. For example, although I hope all of us would like for every human to have a decent place to live, how likely is it that this one organization can overcome the forces like greed, corruption, war, disease, and natural disasters that make poverty such a difficult problem? You could call this category of problems the “failure” problem.

But imagine for a second that this organization could provide every human with a decent place to place to live. Would people still have things to wake up in the middle of the night and worry about? Things like layoffs, divorces, children with eating disorders, cancer, war, and death? In other words, striving to provide everyone with a decent place to live is a noble goal, but humans have many other problems that often seem more pressing than housing. I call this the all-the-other-problems problem.

The failure problem and the all-the-other-problems problem don’t mean that this organization is bad. I would feel great about working for it or donating some money or time to it. But only a naïve idiot would devote *all* their hope, passion, and effort to a vision this unrealistic and incomplete. I submit that this isn’t a Habitat for Humanity problem. All secular vision statements are limited by some combination of (1) a boring, trivial, harmful goal; (2) an inspiring but unlikely to succeed goal; and/or (3) ignoring countless other problems that can make the business’s goal irrelevant or unattainable.

One important purpose of Ephesians is to cast a vision for what churches should aspire to be. Although election might seem like an odd or indirect way to begin a vision statement for the church, I submit that, in the early chapters of Ephesians, Paul is taking the time to address the failure problem and the all-the-other-problems problem. The themes of election and God’s sovereignty—which Paul introduces in 1:3-14—directly address the failure problem. If Paul is right that God the Father works everything according to His will, then the individual and collective success of believers is assured. Similarly, by listing some of the spiritual benefits, Paul is starting to build a case that spiritual matters address humanity’s fundamental problem and thus reduce all the other problems to temporary and passing nuisances.

**Election—some biblical food for thought**

Election—the idea that God chooses believers to receive salvation--is a doctrine that can get people pretty worked up. The concern isn’t so much with election itself. The concern is that, if election is true, then logically God alone must determine what all people believe, including forcing believers to accept Jesus, and forcing nonbelievers to reject salvation.

As logical as that implication might be, I submit that the Bible asserts otherwise. Although the Bible states that God chooses believers, and that no one seeks God and develops saving faith without God’s assistance, it contains verses incompatible with the idea that God forces people to believe or reject God regardless of the person’s desires.

**God says He desires everyone to experience salvation**

Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32 Do I delight in the death of the wicked, declares the Sovereign LORD, and not prefer that he turn from his wicked conduct and live? . . . Get rid of all your transgressions and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no delight in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

1 Timothy 2:3-4 Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our savior, since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

In conversations with unbelievers, these verses allow us to affirm that God loves that person and wants them to experience salvation.

**Evidence God issues a general call to all people, including unbelievers**

Isaiah 65:2, 12 All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations. . . . I will destine you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter; for I called but you did not answer; I spoke but you did not listen. You did evil in my sight and chose what displeases me.

Matt. 22:14 For many are invited, but few are chosen.

Romans 10:18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

These verses allow us to affirm that, regardless of election, God does reach out to all people.

**Evidence unbelievers have a role in the heart-hardening process**

Exodus 8:15 But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.

Hosea 7:13 Woe to them, because they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against me! I long to redeem them but they speak lies against me.

Luke 13:34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate.

These verses indicate that, regardless of election, individual choice is involved in rejecting God’s grace.

**Evidence believers have a role in exercising faith**

Romans 10:10-11 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

These verses indicate that, regardless of election, faith is choice people make, so when sharing the gospel we can affirm that anyone is capable of exercising faith with God’s assistance. (Mark 10:27)

**But the flip side is that we should not ignore verses emphasizing election**

Despite the abundant biblical evidence concerning each individual’s role in whether they choose to have faith or to reject God’s grace, there is equally abundant evidence that God’s sovereign choice is never thwarted:

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Being faithful to the full sweep of scripture requires us to affirm both human choice and divine sovereignty/election. Throughout history, Christians have disagreed on the best way to affirm those principles, but we should all be able to agree that God says: (1) He wants everyone to be saved, and (2) He invites/reaches out to all people. We should therefore cultivate the same attitude.