

Beginnings – ORIGIN *(Where did we come from?)*

- **Only Two Choices**
- **Realize the Significance**
- **Is it Faith or Science?**
 - LAB - Lookable, Accessible, Breakable
- **Guess at the Evidence**
- **Inspect the Evidence**
 - Universe = "Decay"
 - Age of the Earth = "Can't Say"
 - Origin of Life by Chance = "No Way"
 - Evolution of Species and Man = "Lacks Genes and Tweens"
- **No Compromise**

DON'T - Death, Orders of Creation, Names in genealogies, Ten Commandments refer to seven-day week

Intent of Life – LIFE *(Why are we here?)*

- **Love - GOD and MAN**
- **Increase - GROW**
- **Faithfulness - Time, Talent, Treasure**
- **Eternity – Past, Present, Future**

Authority – POWER *(Who's in charge?)* A God Who is:

- **Personal and Loving**
- **Omnipotent**
- **Wise and All-Knowing**
- **Everywhere and Eternal**
- **Righteous and Reliable**

Standards – RULES *(What are the rules?)* God's rules are:

- **Revealed supernaturally, not derived by reason**
- **Universal and apply to everyone, everywhere, all the time**
- **Loving**
- **Enforced**
- **Steadfast**

An Ambassador for Christ

When I try to get a general picture of how God wants me to relate to the world, the role of an ambassador is a particularly helpful perspective for me. The apostle Paul said:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Here are a few observations about this passage:

- As ambassadors we don't view the world as citizens of the world. We are representatives of Christ and citizens of His kingdom, and we should view the world as He does.
- We have been given the ministry of reconciliation, encouraging men to be reconciled with the God Who made them.
- As ambassadors we should not have a fear of man, but a love and fear of the One who sent us. We share God's gospel on Christ's behalf for the good of those who hear it.

So when I view myself as an ambassador it helps me to view my life as God sees it and to view the world as a foreign place in which I've been commissioned to represent my King. This helps me overcome my tendency to fear man and his opinion of me more than I value God's opinion.

Sharing the Gospel

Some Christians believe that the main purpose of our lives is to share the gospel with others to save them from Hell. I do agree that we are to be witnesses/ambassadors for Christ and to share the gospel as He gives us opportunities. But I don't believe God is sitting on His throne wringing His hands in worry about whether my neighbor is going to go to Hell because I neglected to witness to him. This is God's story, and He will save each person He intends to save. I am to share the gospel out of love for people and obedience to God, not because I'm responsible for the salvation of others. I'm not capable of thwarting God's purpose for His people whom He chose before the foundation of the world.

For my children and grandchildren who read this, I pray that every one of you will be saved and that we will be together with Jesus and with each other forever. My specific prayer is that God has chosen each of you as His child. Make your days count by doing the things that will matter for eternity. Be faithful to God, and He will reward you forever.

The acrostic GRACE provides a simple outline of my understanding of the gospel:

- **G**od - In the beginning God purposed to create time, space, matter, and life. He also uniquely created man in His own image.
- **R**ebellion - Man rebelled against God's command and brought sin, death, and curse into the world. Because of sin, man deserves Hell and God's wrath.
- **A**tonement – Jesus Christ atoned for sin by His perfect life, undeserved death, and resurrection from the dead as a perfect substitution for us.
- **C**hoice –If we choose to repent of our sin and accept Christ as Lord and Savior we are forgiven our sins and restored to fellowship with God. Yet God is due ALL the credit because unless He chooses to give us faith we will never choose Him.
- **E**nable – The Holy Spirit enables Christians to resist temptation to sin, to obey God, and to grow in holiness during this life. After this life God will give us glorified and perfected bodies and will make us suitable companions for Christ for eternity.

So Whose Choice Is It?

This is a topic that can be divisive and I raise it with reluctance. But I want my family to know what I believe at this point in my life and why I believe it. *I believe the Bible teaches that only those whom God has chosen will choose to be saved.* I think this position is called a belief in the historic doctrines of grace (God's sovereignty in salvation).

Men I respect believe differently on this, and I used to believe differently. I also know I am capable of being wrong. This is not something we have to understand in order to live our lives in obedience to God – if we are obedient our lives will look the same whether we believe in free will or election. I grieve that this topic has so often become a source of argument and division. **It is important that we be able to explain the reasons for our position, but belittling brothers in Christ who believe differently is arrogant and wrong.**

It seems that the main objection to this position is that it is not "fair" for God to choose only some. This feels valid, but actually whatever God does IS right so this is not a reasonable objection. Some very bright and godly people think that everyone has a self-willed choice. ***But, what is it that is in us that makes one man accept and another reject the gospel? And where did it come from?*** In my opinion **what the Bible teaches is that the only people who will choose Christ are those whom the Father has chosen to save.** For example:

- Numerous passages talk about the elect and God's choosing them before the foundation of the world (e.g. *"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—"* Ephesians 1:4-5 (also Romans 9, 2 Thessalonians 2:13))
- The Bible says that we are dead in our sins, not just sick. Dead people don't make choices. (Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 2:13)
- Jesus describes the process as being "born again" (John 3:3). No conception/birth was ever at the discretion of the "birther".
- Jesus said that no one comes to Him unless the Father sends him. *"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."* John 6:65 (also John 6:44)
- Everyone who believes is born of God - belief is a sign of being saved, not the means. *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well."* 1 John 5:1

There are many well-known verses related to salvation that talk about people calling on Christ and believing in Him and having faith, but I don't believe these necessarily teach that the calling, believing, or faith comes from an autonomous human will. The Bible teaches that **these are a gift from God** (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9), and unless God gives the gift of faith, no one who is dead in his sins will ever choose to be saved.

So the bottom line is that I currently believe **we all do have a choice, but we won't choose to repent and receive salvation unless we've first been chosen and given faith and made alive by God.** God will not reject any who come to Him, but the only ones who seek Him have first been drawn by Him.