

## The Grace of Election

Tim Keller – Doing Justice

Deuteronomy 7: 6-11

*For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup>It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup>but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations, <sup>10</sup>and repays to their face those who hate Him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates Him. He will repay Him to His face. <sup>11</sup>You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.*

Now, we've been looking at the book Deuteronomy and we said the book of Deuteronomy is a series of sermons that Moses preached before he died, and the subject was, "*having experienced the salvation and grace of God...**how shall we then live?***"

How does an experience of God's salvation and grace actually concretely effect the way we live in the world? And tonight, we come to Deuteronomy 7 and we come upon a subject that is very controversial topic, and a difficult one...for everybody, actually. And this word that comes up a couple of times in the verse couple of verses, where it says, "***The Lord your God chose you.***" ***Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, to be His people. He chose you!!***

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament say, I believe, that if you believe, you believe because He opened your heart. So, we're going to see how this text helps us, because I believe the text helps us struggle, very wisely, and it's very, very good...and it tells us three things about this idea that "we are chosen by grace." Being chosen by grace first of all produces...**humility**, secondly **community** because, it creates thirdly **absolute security**. It produces a deep humility and radiant community because, at bottom, it creates an absolute security.

Let's take a look at the first point: When people hear this...about being chosen they struggle. In the Old Testament Israel is said to be chosen...see where it says, "out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, I chose you to be My special treasure...I give Myself to you in a special way...I give Myself to you...I communicate more to you...I protect you more...I chose you.

Now the New Testament, in a sense, redefines the people of God, it's all believers...Jews and Gentiles. And yet, the New Testament says the very same thing about believers. That they are believers because they have been chosen by God. So, Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:16, "**You have not chosen me, I have chosen you.**" In John 6:44, He says, "**no one can come to Me unless the Father draws him.**"

And this isn't just Jesus talking, you have in the book of Acts, the writer Luke is describing a time in which Paul is preaching, and at the end of the preaching, this is what Luke says: "**And as many as were ordained unto eternal life, BELIEVED.**" Acts 13: 48...they were chosen. See, the Biblical teaching about what's called **election**...the Biblical teaching about **election** is this: **if you believe, it's ultimately because God came to you and opened your heart by the Holy Spirit.** Otherwise, if you had a hundred thousand opportunities to choose between God as Savior and yourself as savior, you'd always choose yourself. That's the doctrine.

That God comes and opens your heart...chooses people and opens their hearts by the Holy Spirit, otherwise, if you had a hundred thousand times to choose between God as Savior and yourself as Savior...you'd ALWAYS choose yourself, UNLESS there was an intervention by the Holy Spirit. That's the teaching.

And people struggle...and here's one of the ways they struggle. They say, "*You think you're chosen? You **believe**, simply because God has chosen you? You're the chosen? How arrogant!! How elitist!!*" And by the way, this is not an intramural kind of interesting theological debate. To say that. This is not like *how many angels can dance on the head of a pin*. Or one of those kind of things. Because we live in a world today in which we know that people who believe they have God on their side, and they do awful things. There's a tendency **for people who are religious**, who say, *we have God...we have the truth. To believe that that is a warrant for them to condemn others...to be hostile to others who don't believe*

*what they believe...who don't practice what they practice...to marginalize them...to oppress them, or maybe do something worse.*

And this is one of the big problems in the world today. And yet, if you say this doctrine of election, that people believe because they're chosen, that leads to arrogance and elitism...if you say that, the right response is, ***you don't understand the doctrine at all.*** Because actually, what the Bible teaches about ***"being chosen by grace, produce the opposite of arrogance."*** It produces the opposite of elitism. It undercuts the ordinary religious tendency...the tendency of ordinary believes to feel superior to others.

Take a look at verse 7. ***"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples..."*** Now what is He saying? Here's what He's saying. God's people are His chosen people, BUT they're **not His CHOICE** people. Not the same thing. To be chosen, is not to be choice. He actually says, *'you weren't greater...you weren't better than other people...in fact, you were worse.'*

Look at verse 6. It essentially says, *'You are a treasure **BECAUSE** I chose you. Not that I chose you because you were special.'* For God to say, *'you are chosen'* is radically humbling. He's saying, you would never have a relationship with Me on your own...you would never have achieved it. The only reason you have a relationship with Me is because I chose you. There is nothing in you that is better...there is nothing in you that's different. The reason WE have a relationship...is simply I chose you. And that's radically humbling.

A long time ago, my wife and I were in a class... in which there was a teacher...who was teaching this truth...this doctrine...this idea that if you believe, it's because you've been chosen by Grace. And there was a young woman who was struggling enormously with this whole idea. And she raised her hand and said, ***"I can't accept this. I can't accept the idea that if I believe it's because God chose me. That's unfair. Why doesn't He choose everybody...I believe in free will. And I don't understand this. And...I don't like it."***

And the teacher, was so skillful, so obviously here, some 35 years later I'm telling you about it. I've never forgotten it.

The teacher said, *“Ok, now look...I agree that there are enormous and huge problems that go along with believing the Doctrine of Election. But there are even huger and greater problems if you deny it. And those are your only two options. So what would you like? Huge problems or huger problems? That’s all you’ve got.”*

And she said, *“What are you talking about?”*

And he said, *“all right.”* (She had a roommate who did not believe Christianity...) ...so he said, *“Why are you a Christian? ...and your roommate is not?”*

And she said, *“Because I accepted Christ and my roommate didn’t.”*

He said, *“**Right!!** But, why did you accept Christ and your roommate didn’t?”*

She said, *“Well, because, I repented of my sins and my roommate wouldn’t.”*

He said, *“**Right!** But, why...did you repent and she wouldn’t?”*

And she said, *“Well, I suppose it’s because I was willing to admit I was a sinner and she didn’t want to.”*

He said, *“**Right!!** But, why were you willing to admit you were a sinner and she wasn’t...?”* And he went on and on until finally he said, *“You see where I’ve come...you see what I’m getting at? If you believe, the only difference between you and your roommate...you and a non-believer...**the only difference is God’s grace!!** The only difference is God has opened your heart by the Holy Spirit. And He hasn’t opened your roommate’s heart...at least not yet.*

*And if that’s the only difference...you don’t have any basis on which to disdain her. You don’t have any basis on which to look down on her...or feel superior to her in any way...you have no grounds for saying, ‘what’s the matter with you...why don’t you believe in the right way?’...not at all...nothing different...nothing better. There is nothing better in you AT ALL!!*

*“But, if you, as you seem to be saying, if you believe the difference between you and your roommate is that you’re a little better...at little wiser...a little humbler...you were willing to use your free will and she wasn’t...if you believe the*

*difference is not in God but in you...then I'm pretty worried...because then you have the right to turn to somebody and say, 'why aren't you like me...why don't you believe...why aren't you following God.'*

Then he said, ***"Listen...there are huge problems with believing the doctrine of election but they're all intellectual. Like, why doesn't He save everybody? And why does He choose certain people and not other people? They're intellectual. And they are troubling. But, the problems with not believing the doctrine of election are spiritual and personal and cultural and practical. Because there's nothing this world needs more than a faith that erodes and undercuts the ability of believers to feel superior to other people."***

And the doctrine of election completely does it. It says, you are what you are by SHEER GRACE, and nothing else. There's nothing the world needs more than people who believe the doctrine of election. There are far huger problems to believe you're not saved by grace, but that you're a little better, a little smarter, a little wiser, and a little humbler. That's a problem. And that's a huge problem. ***"And that's why I'm worried about you,"*** he said. And she just stared at him.

And so did I, because I said to myself, ***"Uh, oh!! I gotta believe this too!! Because I don't like the huge problems but I will not live with the huger problems because all I know is that on every page...virtually every page of the Bible...every verse of the Bible, that what I am is by the GRACE OF GOD ALONE. It's sheer grace...not because I'm better or smarter, or use my free will in a more wise way than anyone else and I don't believe that...and that's why I have believed that ever since."***

And if **you say** *"yes, but I do have those intellectual problems now. I see your point. You've boxed me into a corner like you often do...but now, what if I believe in the doctrine of election...I believe because I'm chosen...BUT, why doesn't God choose everybody? What's the matter with Him? Is He up there with a dart board...is He up there with a roulette wheel?"*

**No...look, just because God says, 'the reasons for His choices is not in you'...doesn't mean He has no good and just reasons for why He does and doesn't do.**<sup>1</sup> Now see, we have a tendency to say, *'well, if it's not in us, what good reason could there be?'* **Settle down "center of the universe,"** just because the

---

<sup>1</sup> A divine mystery? (Your sermon transcriber)

reason is not in you, doesn't mean there isn't a good reason. We don't know why. Remember the place where Peter is being told by Jesus at the end of the book of John that he (Peter) is going to die for his faith...be crucified and put to death for his faith? And Peter sees the Apostle John walking by and asks, "*what' going to happen to him, Lord?*" And Jesus says, "*What is that to you, follow me.*"

And see the point is, God only tells you about yourself, and if you believe it's because you were chosen...because God opened your heart, and no other reason than that. And you say, "*Well what about everybody else?*" WHAT IS THAT TO YOU? FOLLOW HIM! He's got His reasons...I don't know what they are, but there is no particular reason not to believe that they are fair and just. And let me just give you a little hint: there's only one place in the Bible that you get a hint at the wisdom and justice behind God's electing GRACE. It's in the book of James, it's only a hint, not the full answer, but in James we're told this: "*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him?*" (James 2:5) In other words, 'has not God chosen those who the world considers poor to be RICH IN FAITH?'

What's he talking about? I'll tell you what he's talking about. Throughout the last 2,000 years there is no doubt that even though God calls people of every tongue, tribe, and nation, the book of Revelation says God wants people from every class, every race, every tongue, tribe, and nation...**nevertheless, in general, sophisticated, educated powerful people**...when they hear the Gospel, and that Gospel is '*you're all sinners...you're all lost...you're all polluted, and your only hope is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and if you receive what Jesus Christ has done...you are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ...THEN, you can get full pardon immediately*'...and you know what...in general, the elites don't like that...but the common people love it.

In fact, you can see it in New York City right now<sup>2</sup>...think about this, New York City is a perfect example...the elites...the professionals...don't think that much of the evangelical Gospel. The Gospel that you're saved by radical Grace, and you have to be born again...and you have to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ...

---

<sup>2</sup> This sermon was preached in 2007

The New York Times doesn't think that much of it...the elites don't think that much of it...**but when** you go out into the city...into the inner city...you'll see storefront churches on every corner. Because the least...the common people...the people that the world considers poor...God tends to choose them. And, you know what...if it's true, that God tends to choose the people that the world rejects...that's pretty fair. That's pretty just. And that just gives us a glimpse...but not a complete glimpse. Isn't God just? Isn't God fair? Yes He is...and therefore, if you really understand the doctrine of election, it not only doesn't lead to arrogance and elitism, it leads to the exact opposite...but to a **deep humility**.

Secondly, it leads to a **radical new community**. Look at verse 6<sup>3</sup>: which will tell you that the purpose of God's choosing is that we be a people and holy people. Now here's what's intriguing about that...why has God chosen who He chooses...to make them a holy people. Now, when you hear the word holy you think of upright, ethical individuals. But the word HOLY means distinct and different, and the reference to people shows that this is not what you and I usually think of...if you've been chosen by grace, it's in order to be part of the community that is holy. A Holy people. A corporate holiness.

We're supposed to be a community that is so radically different that peace and justice and love of the community of the people who believe and are chosen by grace, should be so radically different from the community and social structures of the people around us, that the world sees who God is. This passage right here, chapter 7 verses 6 and 7 is referring back to Exodus 19:5, where God says, *"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

What's that supposed to mean? Well, on the one hand, it says a holy nation. A holy nation means that we're supposed to be a society so different. The world's society is built on self-promotion, power, and the survival of the fittest. That's what New York is made of. But, if you believe in a God who saves the humblest, and the poorest and the weakest, by radical grace and you build a society with that understanding of God, that would be a radically different society. One not built on self-promotion but one built on self-sacrifice, one built not on power but

---

<sup>3</sup> For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth

one built on service, one built not on survival of the fittest, but caring for the poorest and the weakest.

And, if you go through the book of Deuteronomy, you will see that this exactly the kind of radically different society God was trying to build. That's the reason why you'll see, for example, the gleaning laws...and all sorts of laws that help the poor. The gleaning laws meant you were not allowed to harvest your land right out to the corners...you had to limit your profit taking...you had to leave a lot of your grain for the poor. And there were all sorts of other rules that God says in Deuteronomy 15, if you obey all the laws I'm laying down in this book, there'll be no poor among you. No poor.

Do you know...the Bible says, in Deuteronomy, that adultery is not only a sin and a crime for a wife, but for a husband as well. Do you realize that immediately sets the Jews off from every other community around, for every other nation adultery was only a sin for a wife. It was a simple double standard for other nations. But not amongst the people of God.

A community, built not on self-promotion and pride and **self-justification**<sup>4</sup> but on radical grace to the poor...is different. Sex, money, and power inside the believing community must operate in a completely different way that it does "out there." Out there sex is a way of personal, individual fulfillment. In the Bible, in the community, we'll see that sex is a way of building families and community. Out there, the money you earn is yours. With an understanding of grace, however, GRACE!! Have you made a lot of money? It's grace!! "*But I've worked so hard!*" It's all grace! It's a gift. It's all from God. He set things up for you. He opened the doors for you. Once you realize grace...grace...suddenly the money and power I've got belongs to the community...not to me. It belongs to God, and therefore, to the community and not to me.

And a community of people who've been changed by radical grace is going to be a HOLY PEOPLE. Radically different. So, we're supposed to be a counter-culture in which everything...family life...business life...the way races get together...the way people use their money...the way people use their sexuality...radically different from everyone around them. But not only that. Remember what I said...in Exodus

---

<sup>4</sup> *The default mode of the human heart is self-justification.* (Tim Keller in his sermon, the Prodigal Sons, 1<sup>st</sup> sermon in fall, 2005 in the series, The Vision of Redeemer.



19, not only are we supposed to be a holy nation, but a KINGDOM OF PRIESTS. What's that mean?

A kingdom of priests? Priests were mediators. Priests were ways in which people could come to God. They were connectors. And when God says to Israel, you're *a kingdom of priests*...and when Peter says...all Christians, and he applies this to us...in 1 Peter 2:9, where he says "***But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*** (that's being applied to us)...and what does it mean to be a royal priesthood? It means we through the beauty of our corporate life connect people to God. The world will only know who God is through the beauty of our community...through the beauty of our relationships. That's what it's saying.

Jesus was saying that when He said, "***I want My disciples to love each other so the world will know that 'O Father, You sent Me.'***" That's what Peter means in 1 Peter 2: 9 when he said, "...You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation." God's own people called to declare the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into light.<sup>5</sup> It's not happening, but this is what we're called to do. The world should be looking at how we relate to each other...how we love each other...how we live together...and say, "never saw anything like that."

**LOOK**...there's people of different races getting along in the church that never get along outside the church. **LOOK**...there's people inside the church with all kinds of money and power spending it on others in a way that I've never seen before. **LOOK**...inside the church sex isn't feared like in traditional cultures or glamorized like in secular cultures. It's something else entirely. The world should be looking...WHY? Because we're corporate priests. God says the world won't even ***know who I am*** except through the beauty of your corporate life. And the purpose of being chosen by grace is for you to be in a community like that. ARE YOU?

Listen...do you see how complicated this is? Are you holy? The answer is, you can't be holy by yourself. Because holiness here is not referring to individual, ethical uprightness...it means being part of a community that the world has never seen. Are you part of a community like that? Do you realize that just coming to

---

<sup>5</sup> *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.* 1 Peter 2: 9

church and going home doesn't make you part of a community. Oh, no! Hey...if you go to a class...you're there with other students...but you're not necessarily part of the community...you're just studying together...that's all you do together. Or do you go to work...that doesn't make you a community because you're just working together.

But a community is like a family...or a neighborhood...or a village, in which people study together, and work together, and eat together, and play together. Their relationships are multiplex. And for you to just come to church once a week...or come a couple times a week...and not get deeply involved in community means you're not 'being holy.' 'Cause you've got to be in a community. You have to be in an alternate society.

But not only that...our community has to be different. It's got to be holy. So for example...I don't know if this is true or not but I'm assuming it is, for at least 5 or 10 years people have been telling me this about Redeemer...and I think it's probably true: in Manhattan, people choose spouses primarily on looks and money. And then, '***we'll work on the character part.***' Ok...if the person has looks and money, '*then we'll see...if they have character flaws we'll work on it.*' Non-negotiables are looks and money. '*They don't have looks and money, then forget about it. I don't care how nice they are.*' Ok...looks and money!!

And I've been told that by and large inside Redeemer<sup>6</sup> spouses and mates are chosen on the same basis. And if that's true, and I don't have any reason not to believe it's true, WE'RE NOT HOLY! WE'RE NOT DIFFERENT. And **therefore** *we're not declaring the excellences of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

And we're not living out "*our being chosen by grace!!*" Don't you see how complex this is? You can't work on being holy by yourself. You gotta do it in a community. And that's the purpose of being chosen by grace. So if you're chosen by grace it leads to DEEP HUMILITY...AND, it needs to lead to a radiant community.

But...this leaves us with a problem, does it not? And the answer is, why isn't our community all that radiant? I would say it's because don't understand or grasp or,

---

<sup>6</sup> Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

maybe, appropriate the real most fundamental fruit of knowing you're chosen by sheer grace...and that is, the absolute security that comes from knowing...

What do I mean by that? Look, here in verses 7-8...there's an interesting bit of logic. Let me pull out some of the prepositional phrases so show you what's being said in verses 7 and 8. Basically saying this: God did not love you because you were greater...it was because He loved you that He redeemed you from the land of slavery. You get that? God didn't love you because you were greater than other nations. It was because He loved you that He redeemed you from slavery.

Thirty-six years ago I heard a sermon I've never forgotten, on Deuteronomy 7:7: in which the preacher said, "*That is circular reasoning.*" See what it's saying: God didn't love you because you were greater...God didn't love you because you were smarter...God didn't love you because you were better...He didn't love you because you were more special...***He loved you just because He loved you.***

He loved you because He loved you because He loved you. And then the preacher said, "***I want you to know that is the most fundamental need of your heart, and true love has to be like that...and there's nowhere to get it but in God.***" And then he gave this illustration: guys out there who are married (and I wasn't at the time but I understood what he meant), he said, "At some point your wife is going to come to you and say, 'honey, do you love me?' And you're going to say, 'of course I love you.' And then she's going to say, 'why do you love me?' And he said, "don't do this...don't say, '*because you're so good looking and you're a size 8.*'"

Because she's going to say, '*well what if I can't get back into a size 8 after I have the babies?*' And you say, '*well, alright, it's because of those beautiful eyes of yours...and beautiful face...and that beautiful skin of yours.*' And she's going to say, '*Have you ever heard of aging?*' And then you say, '*well, we love to do things together...outdoor stuff together...and sports together...I just love that companionship.*'

And she says, '*what if I have a health problem?*' Well, you say, '*what I really love about you is your scintillating wit.*' And she says, '*well, what if I have a season of depression?*' And you say, '*well, what's really important is that you're a person of character and you're honest and you're transparent and you're forthright.*' And she say, '*what if I have a moral lapse?*' And the preacher said, "***the trouble inside***

***every answer...*** 'I love you because you're great looking...and I love you because you're smart...I love you because you're accomplished...I love you because of the things we can do together...I love you because...' ***"The trouble with every single one of those answers is that you're not loving her for her."***

Then he said, *"You're loving her for some product that benefits you. And she's there wondering what happens if the products don't come? 'You're not loving me.'* And there are many friendships and marriages that are really very much based on that. You don't love the person for the person, but the person for the product. But the only real answer that any human heart really wants...the deepest need of the human heart...if to have somebody else look at you and say, 'honey, I love you...just because I love you. I love you just because I love you.'

*'Yes, of course, there were many things about you that I admired, that drew my eyes to you, but those were the occasion for my love...the cause of my love...but I love you just because I love you. I love you in spite of all your strengths and your weaknesses. And even though, there may be times...I know there will be times I confront you, strongly about what's going on with your life...I will be doing that for you! I'll still be loving you. And not just try to get you off my back.'*

And the **preacher said, 'here's the problem.** *There is no source of that kind of love in this world. Even the best marriages are somewhat conditional. Even the best friendships are somewhat conditional. Public acclaim is tremendously conditional. Professional success...the love we get from all these other things are conditional. Some very...some less so, but they are conditional because everybody in this world who could love you is NEEDY!! We all have needs. Only God has no need. And only God could say, **only God does say, 'I love you just because I love you.'**"*

*I (God) don't love you because you're better...smarter...prettier...I don't love you because you're a size 8...because you're a greater people or worse people...I just love you because I love you...because I love you. I love you unconditionally.*

And if you believe the God of the universe says that to you, that is the ultimate unassailable foundation upon which to build a life and an identity. And all other identities are radically insecure compared to that. That's an absolutely secure one.

Now...here's the right response. How is that possible? How can I possibly believe that God could love me unconditionally, when not only do I know that I fail, but also you've got passages like this...Now look, verses 7, 8, and 9 say...I love you because I love you because I love you...because of the oath that I gave to your forefathers...I love you because I'm committed to you...I love you NOT because you're greater or better, just because I love you.

Now, down in verse 11...look at what it says "**therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today**" <sup>7</sup> or verse 10 "I will destroy you." I love you unconditionally so be careful...obey absolutely everything I tell you today or I will destroy you. And you say, 'What? WHAT?'

**Now...I'm going to give you a key here to understand the whole Bible.** Because, all through the Bible you've got statements that say, '*I am God and I am holy and I cannot tolerate sin and I cannot tolerate evil so you must obey me or I'll destroy you.*' On the other hand, you've got statements like '*I will never leave you or forsake you...I will never give up on you...I will never let you down.*'

**And the question comes up** in light of these statements is: 'are the blessings of God basically unconditional or basically conditional? Are the blessings of God unconditional...which means basically in the end, all that stuff about destroying, basically God will just accept everybody? Or, are they basically conditional? In spite of all that stuff about God loving us no matter what, basically you've got to be a good person or God will destroy you. Which is it?

And the liberal approach to God, '*well, in the end, God includes everybody and you know, nobody is left out.*' And the conservative approach to God is, '*in the end, you've got to be REALLY GOOD.*' **Which is it?**

**Not until you get to the Cross** do you understand...are the blessings of God unconditional or conditional? YES! NO! Both...neither!

---

<sup>7</sup> ...and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. <sup>11</sup> You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.

What was happening to Jesus on the Cross? Do you know? What was happening to Him? He is being forsaken by God...He is being abandoned by His friends...Speared...Nailed...He's being gouged...He's being flogged...You know what, **HE'S BEING DESTROYED!** He's being destroyed. Spiritually and physically and socially and relationally...destroyed. He's the **only Person in history** who came, and fulfilled verse 11...and obeyed every single command, and law, and decree. And yet, though He's the only Person in history that earned the blessings of total covenant obedience, at the end of His life...He goes to the Cross and takes the curse for covenant disobedience. He is destroyed...**IN OUR PLACE.**

And that means, if you understand that, then you are neither a liberal nor a conservative (spiritually speaking)...you're neither a moralistic person nor an immoral person...neither a traditional religious person nor a secular person, and Here's why: We know...that Jesus fulfilled the conditions for the blessing of God...**so that now God can love us UNCONDITIONALLY!**

Jesus fulfilled the conditions for the blessings of God. So, now God can love us unconditionally...now He can say, *'I love you just because I love you...because I love you...because I love you.'* It's so important to understand that. That is so different than either what you might call 'traditional moralism' or 'liberal secularism.' And that changes everything...because now, when I see Jesus Christ doing that for me...dying for me...being **destroyed for me**, I know the law of God is important. I can't blow that off. I can't blow off one decree or one command. If He did that for me, the Law of God is crucial...and for the love of my Savior...for the beauty of my Prince...who did this for me...I want to be like Him...I want to please Him...I want to share in His character...and I want to obey every single decree.

So, I take it very seriously...but on the other hand, I know that when I fail, He's going to love me anyway. The blessings of God are BOTH conditional and unconditional. Jesus fulfills the condition so that we can receive God's unconditional love. And once you understand that, that radically changes your identity.

You know, it's pretty hard to get around (in NYC) back and forth to these services this time of year because of all these ethnic identity parades. Greek Day...and

Israeli Day...and Portuguese Day...and back and forth. And listen, everyone in this room has a gender identity and a cultural identity. You're white...you're Asian...you're Hispanic...you're African American...you're male...you're female. Every one of those cultural identities puts pressure on you. And it's different pressure.

If you're Asian, there are certain things you've got to be for your culture to say, '*you're a good man...you're a good woman.*' Certain things that are different than what the African American culture identity puts on...or the white. Our cultural identities put huge pressure on us. And if you succeed and be the kind of person your culture says you need to be, you'll be proud and self-righteous...but always insecure. If you fail...you'll hate yourself forever.

But now, what happens if you come to realize there's finally a source of unconditional love...in belief that you're chosen by Grace...you have an absolutely secure identity...God loves me...He loves me just because He loves. That will...when you take that into the center of your being...that relativizes your cultural identity rather than destroying it. I am a Christian first...a white male second. And what that means is that my culture says to 'be a man...there are certain things that a manly people do and certain things that manly people don't do. Of course I'm a man but now all the pressure's off!! What if I don't quite live up? I'm a Christian **first** and I'm white, or black, or Hispanic...or Asian...or male...or female...**SECOND!!** The pressure is off.

My cultural identity is relativized but not destroyed. You're still an Asian Christian...or an African American Christian...or a Hispanic Christian...or an Anglo Christian. You don't shift!! When you become a Christian...you're African American...you don't become Asian...you don't become Anglo. **Your identity is relativized.** The pressure is off. You enjoy it but it no longer drives you.

Harvie Conn was a missionary in Korea. And Harvie was trying to reach prostitutes for Christ. And in the particular Asian culture, prostitutes had a far lower status than prostitutes do in other societies. And Harvie couldn't break through, because **when he offered the love of Christ**, they said, '*sorry, Christ would never have anything to do with me. You don't understand. I am an absolute...I'm scum.*' Finally, one day Harvie said, let me tell you the doctrine of predestination. Let me tell you the doctrine of election.

***'Our God doesn't love you because you're good...doesn't love you because you're moral...doesn't love you because you're humbler...doesn't love you because you're surrendered. He actually just chooses certain people and sets His love on you and loves you just because He loves you. That's how you're saved.'***

And the prostitute said, *'what?!!*

Harvie: *'Yes!!'*

She said, *'You mean He just loves people like that?'*

Harvie: *'Yes.'*

*'Well, how do I know if He loves me?'*

Then Harvie said, *'When I tell you the story of Jesus dying for you, does that move you?'*

*'Yes.'*

*'Do you want Him?'*

*'Yeah!'*

*'You aren't capable of wanting Him IF He wasn't wanting you! You aren't capable of loving Him unless He was loving you.'*

And Harvie found that prostitutes started coming to Christ because they got a radical new cultural identity that took all the pressure off their old cultural identity. They were still Koreans. But, they were Korean Christians. And they could then look themselves in the mirror...because what defined them was not their cultural identity, but their new identity in Christ.

And when that happens, you form a new community in which black, white Asian, Hispanic, male and female...people who had trouble getting along because your



cultural identities were driving you...and it was an ultimate thing...it's all relativized...the barriers have come down...and we can **begin to be a new community**. Radiant community.

And because we're able to sing...

**My heart owns none before thee,  
For thy rich Grace I thirst,  
This knowing if I love thee  
Thou must have loved me first!!**

LET'S PRAY

*Our Father, we ask that you'd help us understand how, knowing that we're chosen by Grace, would rather be transformed in our cultural identity and radically transform also our community. And we ask that you would give us that unassailable foundation that comes from knowing that we're loved...just because we're loved. And, that in You, we have that love. And we ask that You would it flood our lives, individually and corporately, so that we really can declare the glories of Him that called us out of darkness into His marvelous light...Your marvelous Light.*

*In Jesus Name,  
Amen*