

In Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1, Paul says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” You are the called because you’ve had a calling. And the church is simply the called ones. We are the assembly of the called.

We’re a group specially summoned together by God for His purposes. When you said that you really defined the church. We’re a group of people especially summoned together by God for His purposes. We are not a human organization built by good people. We are not a human organization designed by well-intentioned people. We are not a human organization basically constructed around some tradition. We are a group of people summoned together by God Himself for His purposes.

So we can say this: a church is an assembly of people called by God. We are an assembly of people called by God. The real identity of the church then is determined by divine purpose. God is calling us. God has called us into being.

Now, the church then is the assembly of the called. Our course has been charted by God. Our destiny has been planned by God. Our members have been chosen by God. Our purposes have been defined by God. Our ministries have been revealed by God. We are an organization of people, an organism of people assembled by God for divine purposes. That’s why repeatedly the church is identified as the church. And you need to understand the word “church” as “the called ones,” “the assembly of the called ones.”

This appears in the original Greek, [Ephesians 1:3](#) to 14, to be one long sentence; although in the English translations the translators have stuck periods at certain points. Actually in the Greek, this could flow as one long sentence starting in verse 3 and not ending until the end of verse 14, just a linking together of phrases really defining the church.

Starting in verse 3, we’re going to understand our calling; and that is synonymous with being a church. We have been called by God. We’ve been summoned by God. We are a gathering of people that have been brought together by divine supernatural power through the work of God in salvation.

The apostle Paul here says we have been **called before, called out, called from, called to, called under, called with, called unto, and called for**. Each of those is essential to understanding what the church is to be. This can’t change.

We are called before. In verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who’s blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” **We were called before**. This association of believing people was called by God, initially chosen by God before the foundation of the world. Obviously, the actual calling came in time, but the plan for that calling was established in eternity past.

In verse 5, “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention” – or good pleasure – “of His will.” He *proorizō*-ed us in the Greek. He predetermined. He predestined us.

This obviously speaks of the great doctrine of **election**, the doctrine of predestination. We were called before the foundation of the world in the purposes of God. That calling didn't actually come until time when we were born and we grew up and we heard the gospel, and the Spirit prompted us and we believed, and we were added to the church. But in the plan of God, that calling was established in eternity past. The passage literally tells us, verse 4, He chose us, He picked us out for Himself. In eternity past, God chose His church. Here is the first cause of our existence.

It was God who chose, and then it was, according to [John 6:44](#), the Father who drew us. "No man comes except the Father draws him." Whom He chooses, He draws. We know that great doctrine. As George Chadwick once wrote, "I sought the Lord, and afterwards I knew He moved my soul to seek Him seeking me. It was not I that found O Savior true; no, it was I found by You."

The **second thing about our calling is we were called out**. In verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." We have been called out. **Called before, that's election; called out, that's redemption**. We have been called out of darkness. We have been called out of sin. We've been called out of death. We've been called out of hell. We are the regenerate church. We are the truly redeemed church. We have been redeemed through His blood. We have received the forgiveness of our trespasses by grace. That's what makes us the true church.

I have reminded the people through the years of an old – it was an old slab in a cathedral in Lübeck, Germany, and it says this: "Thus speaks Christ our Lord to us: 'You call Me Master, and obey Me not; you call Me light, and see Me not; you call Me the Way, and walk Me not; you call Me life, and live Me not; you call Me wise, and follow Me not; you call Me fair, and love Me not; you call Me rich, and ask Me not; you call Me eternal, and seek Me not. If I condemn you, blame Me not.'"

Let's go to a **third one: We are called from**. Go back to verse 4: "We have been chosen and we have been redeemed, that we should be holy and blameless before Him." This is called from. We have been called from sin; we have been called to holiness. **This would be the doctrine of sanctification**. The word, the operative word there is "holy, holy." We're called to be separated from sin. We are called by the Spirit's power to remain unspotted from the world, the Bible says. Another thing that calls people to holiness is an uncompromising attitude. And since we are the called ones who have been called out of darkness, called from sin, it is crucial that we do not compromise with the unholy world around us. There's a fourth element to our calling. We are called before the world, called out of the world, call from the world, but we're also called to; and this would be the doctrine of identification. We talked about election, talked about redemption, talked about sanctification, **now identification**.

Look at verse 4: "He chose us in Him, in Him." Verse 5: "He predestined us to the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Again, we have literally been, as it were, placed in Christ, adopted as sons. Verse 6: "Accepted by God in the beloved, in the beloved," a great statement. And what you have here is our identification with Jesus Christ. We are in Christ. We are adopted as sons of God through Christ to Himself. And we have been blessed, "freely blessed, because" – verse 6 – "we are in the Beloved One,".

We primarily are not saved to join a group; we are saved to enter into a personal, intimate, unique relationship with the living God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. It's just an astounding reality. We can't even be understood by the world around us. They can't tell us how to behave, because they don't even comprehend us.

This is identification. We belong to Christ. We belong to God. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ in His Spirit dwells within us; God is in us. So when we teach, when we talk about Christianity, we're not talking about simply accepting mentally some dogma; we're talking about a relationship of intimacy with the living God that ties us to Him in a common life, in a common sharing of all divine resources.

So the church is called before, called out, called from, called to; and number five, called under. Verse 8 talks about "the riches of His grace" – in verse 7 – "which He lavished on us." And then he says in verse 8, "In all wisdom and insight, He has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him."

"Where has God made known the mystery of His will? Scripture. Our relationship to God is a relationship of authority. We are not the authority, **we are under authority.** We have been called under. All wisdom and all insight has been known to God and revealed to us according to His kind intention; and, of course, it has been revealed to us in Scripture. That is the only source of that revelation.

And then number six, we are called with. Go down to verse 10 there in Ephesians 1. He says, "with a view to the administration" – or the purpose of God – "suitable to the fullness of time, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth."

God will gather together in one all things in Christ. That's the summing up of all things in Christ. **This is the doctrine of unification, doctrine of unity.** This togetherness that comes in the fullness of redemptive history on the completion of the whole salvation plan at the restoration of universal unity when everything is summed up in Christ. But that is a goal that is being lived out in some measure even now. We understand that the purposes of God are going to sum up everything in Christ, that one day we will all be gathered in Christ, we'll all be gathered to glory, we'll all be the consummated bride of Jesus Christ, everything in heaven, everything in earth; that would be believers in glory, believers here on earth, will all be gathered. The whole gathering of everybody together in the end in one is the consummate purpose of God.

So we, in defining the church, have to understand the doctrine of election, redemption, sanctification, identification, revelation, and unification.

Another great term: glorification. We have been **called unto glory.** Look at verse 11: "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will." Literally, we have an inheritance waiting for us. "It is an inheritance of eternal glory" – verse 12 – "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In whom, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, were sealed in Him with the Spirit of promise, who is given us a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

You were saved in order that someday you might be to the praise of God's glory, so that in the end, the purpose of God is eternal glory. And that's been a major theme. I mean, that's the way it's going to be in eternity, that's the way it ought to be now; we ought to live to His glory. I have preached on that; I have talked about that.

One final note. I just want to add in here in verse 13, "after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed," **We have been called for proclamation.**

The reason we believe is because somebody preached the gospel to us. Faith comes by hearing the truth. **We have been called before, that's election; called out, that's redemption; called from, that's sanctification; called to, that's identification; called under, that's revelation; called with, unification; called unto, glorification; and called for, proclamation.** Our responsibility as long as we're in this world is to give the message of truth, verse 13, the gospel of salvation, so people can hear and believe. And we've always believed that; we've always done that.

Portions of "A Church for the New Millennium" by John MacArthur

Audio and full transcript

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