

Abiding in Christ, Part 4: His Sovereign Grace (John 15:16-17)

John 15:16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

George Muller lived this passage as much as anyone I know. He loved over 10,000 orphans through his ministry in England, he bore much lasting fruit from his ministry, he saw himself as appointed to go and bear witness as an evangelist, and he's probably best known for his faith and prayer like v. 16 says at the end. He relied on the Lord to provide and it seemed whatever he asked of His Father for the sake of Christ was granted. What was the secret to Muller's joyfulness in difficulties and fruitfulness in ministry? You have to wait till the end of the message for that, so stay with me, but it really ties in with the truths we'll see in this text which Jesus spoke for our joy, v. 11.

Last week we studied Christ's joy in v. 11 using the acronym JOY, today I want to look at His sovereign grace using the acronym GRACE¹ in John 15:

G - God's Sovereign Choice

In Eph 1 Paul uses the same word *chose* as v. 16 and says God '*chose us... before the foundation of the world...to the praise of the glory of His grace.*' Jesus uses the same Grk word here in v. 16 '*I chose you.*' Romans speaks of His elect people '*chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace*' (11:5-6). NKJV has '*election of grace,*' NASB it's '*according to God's gracious choice*' (note 'lit. choice of grace'). Same Greek root word in Jn 15:16 '*You did not choose me, I chose you*' (that's another way to say chosen by grace, not you). Grace isn't on the basis of something the sinner does or decides, grace by its very definition is unmerited undeserved favor or kindness God chooses to give.

This word *choose* is also translated *select* or *elect*, it's choosing out from a bigger group. You can see that in v. 19. The world is the bigger group, the world isn't chosen, v. 19 says He chose or elected some *out from the world*. In v. 16 the original language grammar has an emphatic extra pronoun: '*you did not choose me, but I chose you.*' Jesus put emphasis on it not being you ultimately who chose me, but He says I chose you. There were 2 different Greek words that can be translated '*but.*' Here Jesus uses a stronger word to make the strongest contrast between His choice and their choice.

1st century tradition was followers of a rabbi would choose which one they wanted to be followers of, but Jesus is saying emphatically and dramatically that's not the case here. Jesus chose them to be His followers, not vice-versa. That went against Jewish cultural thinking and it goes against the American way of leaders we elect: 'of the people, by the people, and for the people.' Our country is talking a lot about the upcoming election, but as Jesus talks about election to His kingdom, it's 'of Him, by Him, for Him, through Him, from Him, to God be all glory!' Kings aren't chosen by vote. A sovereign ruler chooses who will be his servants. That's what we are in v. 15, but the glorious truth in v. 15 is He chooses us as friends He reveals God's heart to!

When Jesus says '*I chose you*' in v. 16, it's not just a choosing to service, or limited to the choosing of the original 12 apostles. Go back to chapter 13 for the context of how He already used the same word *chosen* in same message, and He makes clear it's choosing to salvation those He cleanses from sin. In 13:5 Jesus washes the feet of the 12 disciples, then explains in v. 10 to Peter "*The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.*" ¹¹ *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."* ['clean' here means spiritually cleansed of sin, those who are saved] ... ¹⁸ *I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'* [then in v. 30 after Judas eats the bread Jesus gives him, he gets up and turns heel against Jesus as he goes out to turn a profit by turning Jesus over]

v. 18 is clear Jesus isn't using the word *chosen* for service as the 12 apostles for those 3 years, it's *chosen* for salvation in this context, and Judas wasn't His elect. ¹⁸ *I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen* ... (2 Thess 2:13 applies that to all believers: "*God...chose you for salvation*"). Now turn back to John 15, and it's after Judas is gone that Jesus repeats that word *cleansed* in v. 3 to assure the remaining 11 their sins are forgiven and in v. 16 He repeats that word chose '*You did not choose me but I chose you*'. Judas was selected for service as an apostle, but Jesus said He wasn't one of His *chosen* in 13:18, Judas wasn't chosen for salvation and wasn't cleansed. Now Judas is gone, 15:3 says you're all cleansed/saved, '*I chose you*,' v. 16

Just 2 or 3 days earlier Jesus used this same word 'chose' to refer to all the elect till the end of time in Mark 13:20: '*For the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days*' (context is last days). Those Jesus *chose* are *the elect* in the way He's been teaching, not just them, future believers, too.

So this language of those Jesus chose isn't limited to the original disciples in the upper room, Jesus the same week used the same term to speak of all He chooses as His elect until His 2nd coming, same with the rest of the NT.

Reformation Study Bible, 2015 ed., says v. 16a doesn't mean 'His disciples have exercised no will of their own; they have chosen to follow Him. Rather, He is indicating that the first initiative, the original and saving choice, is His (Mark 1:17; 2:14 [where Jesus chose saying *follow me*]). Had He not chosen them, they would not have chosen Him. Jesus' call to service as apostles included even the traitor Judas (6:70), but here the choice of which He speaks is election to salvation (13:18; Eph. 1:4), since its outcome is the bearing of fruit that abides [in v. 16, this] emphasizes the sovereign activity of God exercised without violation of the human act of decision.'²

2 years from now this month will mark the 500th anniversary of Luther's 95 Theses that sparked the Reformation starting on October 31st, 1517. Luther wrote on the Roman Catholic view of works+grace where it's sinners who: do the choosing and initiate the friendship...God's grace comes hobbling along behind [they say it's] not He who chooses us, but...we seek Him and want to make Him our friend...[as if God's enemies would or could but v. 16 says] *You did not choose Me*; that is, you are not My friends by reason of anything that you have done; you are friends by reason of what I have done ... For I was not found by you; but I had to go in search of you and bring you to Myself ... and have called you out of the darkness before you asked for it or did anything...*You did not choose Me, but I chose you*...Scripture reproves and [removes] any choosing on our part before and without God's³

Those chosen and regenerated then choose to follow Jesus and love Jesus, but John understood and wrote '*We love Him because He first loved us*' (1 John 4:19 NKJV). In that sense, Christians do choose to follow Jesus but it's *because* He first drew us. We must daily take up our cross and make daily choices to follow Him, after His choice of us, because of His. His choice is the instigating and enabling choice: *You did not choose me, but I chose you*.

J. V. McGee quotes a hymn: Tis not that I did choose Thee For, Lord, that could not be
This heart would still refuse Thee, But Thou hast chosen me ...
My heart owns none before Thee, For Thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love Thee, Thou must have loved me first.⁴

That takes us from our first point, letter G – God's Sovereign Choice, to ...
R – Radical Sinfulness (Our Need)

Look again at our text in v. 16: '*You did not choose me...*' That makes sense if you go back in context to v. 5 where Jesus explains at the very end of v. 5 '*for apart from me you can do nothing.*' Jesus doesn't say 'nothing except choose me,' there's nothing spiritually we can do apart from being in Christ. Before I'm in abiding relationship with Him, spiritually I can do nothing to save myself, please God, or change my radical sinful condition. That's why I didn't choose Him left to my sinful self. Jesus sought me when a stranger.⁵ I know my heart would still refuse Jesus had Jesus not chosen me! This new heart and nature in me can choose and love Him now because He first loved

[we sing: 'if You had not loved me first I would refuse you still'⁶]

Radical means 'the fundamental nature of something' (Oxford) or the Latin is the 'root' or 'core' of something. Like bad apples, fallen man is sinful to the core of his being, from the inside (heart and will). Some look worse on the outside than others, but all are rotten within since Adam ate of the tree, and the apple doesn't fall far from it in his family tree, whatever fruit he ate. By radical I don't mean extreme, that we're all as sinful or depraved as we could be outwardly, but the totality of our being inwardly is tainted by sin, including our will and what it's inclined to and loves. We're bad to the bone

If you grasp the end of v. 5 you won't stumble over the start of v. 16. If you get that *apart from Him you can do nothing*, you won't argue you could do something like choosing Him if you're apart from Him. Look at v. 15: Jesus says '*No longer do I call you servants*' (NASB *slaves*). This is an important part of the context in the verse right before v. 16: He chose them as '*slaves.*' Now go back to chapter 8 because this isn't the first time He used this word for slaves. In John 8, v. 33, the Jews boasted that they were free but in v. 34 He said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin* [same word as 15:15].³⁵ *The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever.*³⁶ *So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*

Men boast of free will or freedom but we're not as free as we think we are. We're slaves. A slave can't just choose or do something to free himself, only Jesus can choose to set us truly free from sin's slavery. But apart from Jesus we can do nothing, we won't even receive His truth. v. 43: *Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word.*⁴⁴ *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.* ...so 15:5 *you can do nothing* isn't a physical disability, it's spiritual refusal to hear what they can't bear. Fallen man's very will and desire is of the devil and in a sense they cannot because they will not, as Jn 5:40 says in the KJV you '*will not come to me.*' The NASB is '*you are unwilling to come to me*'

ESV of 5:40 says '*you refuse to come to me that you may have life.*' In Rom 1 it's not an issue of comprehension, it's suppression of truth. Unserved sinners are responsible for their willful refusal and stubborn unwillingness. What's the only hope for rebels and slaves of sin? Our 3rd point in John 15:

A - A Particular Redemption (redemption=buying back slave you chose)
 Look again at John 15:16: '*You did not choose me, but I chose you...*' Who is He talking to back in v. 15? Those who He had called slaves who He chose to call His friends. In the background of the NT world, a master would go to a slave market and would choose slaves that he would buy and bring to his house. The slave on the slave market didn't choose his master, the master chose the slave. So we may stumble over v. 16 as Americans, but it was no confusion for them to hear a master say 'you didn't choose me, I chose you'

You as slaves didn't choose your Master, but He chose you for reasons only known to Him. Why He chose some slaves and not others I don't know and He hasn't told me so don't ask me why after the service! But I trust Him and His character and I won't trust there's anything better or about me or that it's because I made a better choice than other slaves of sin who weren't as smart as me. No, all I know is v. 16 says I didn't choose the Master, He chose me.

The NT readers understood this, and they also knew when a master choose a slave, a price had to be paid, and there was a process called redemption. In our case the redemption paid was His life for ours. ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you slaves ...*

This is redemption for a particular group of slaves. Jesus laid down His life for His friends, and not everyone is His friends, v. 14 says it's those who are following Him and His Word. Redemption is limited to a particular people. The world is not redeemed, redeemed in the NT is another word for saved. Yes, *God so loved the world*, but only *whosoever believes* are the redeemed.

[He didn't die for no one in particular or just as a potential Savior]

If you go back to John 10 Jesus explains this in terms of *the sheep*. Jn 10:11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* Who are the sheep? Not everybody. Scripture calls unbelievers goats but v. 3 calls the sheep '*His own*' and it says '*the sheep follow him.*' Jesus died for His own, for sheep who will follow Him. End of v. 15 repeats that He died for the sheep. ¹⁶ *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold* [i.e. Israel]. *I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice* [Gentile followers].

Look at 11:52. Caiaphas prophesied Jesus would die for the people, v. 51b '*...Jesus would die for the nation,⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad* [cf. 1 Jn 2:2] Other 'all' statements may mean not just Jews, it's sufficient for all peoples. Jesus died for all God's children, all His children of the world; red, brown, yellow, black or white. His redeemed children are from every group, Rev 7. In Jn 20:17 after His redemption was done He calls believers '*my brothers*'

And that takes us to letter C in our outline: **C - Called Effectually**

What that means is this call is effective, it effects or enables what it calls for (*my brothers* actually effectively makes them brothers, and *my friends* back in Jn 15:15 actually makes them friends of Jesus). They didn't choose Jesus to be their friend, but He chose them and in calling them friends, effectually that makes them friends of the King. It's like in chapter 11 when Jesus calls '*Lazarus, come forth*'; that was an effectual call that actually enabled him to. Dead people don't normally respond to calls like that, and a spiritually dead person doesn't normally respond, but Jesus effectually calls to life (5:21-25) [Eph 2:5-6, Col 2:13 says when we were dead, He made us alive]

Those He calls from death to life and from blindness to sight see Christ and find Him irresistible as it says in Jn 6 they're drawn like a magnet of mercy. In John 6:44 Jesus describes this drawing or effectual calling in these words '*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day* [so all He draws in that way will be raised to life and without that drawing no one comes to Jesus. 6:65 says] *he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." ...⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.*

Nothing in our flesh can take credit for coming to Jesus, God gives life and draws and when He effectually calls us to life in His vineyard, we will bear fruit. 15:16: '*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit...*' Christ's calling of appointment comes with His enablement. Those He calls to saving faith will bear fruit, as v. 8 says.

Which takes us to the last letter in GRACE – **E – Enduring Life in Christ**

The sovereign grace that chooses us and overcomes our radical sinfulness and redeems us from slavery to intimacy as friends and effectually calls or appoints us to bear fruit, that grace also makes sure its lasting life and fruit: '*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide* [or that *will remain/last*]

This enduring or abiding fruit we have proves we're truly saved in v. 8, and in v. 9 this abiding love we abide in is the love the Father has for the Son. In other words, this love and life is enduring, it's not ending any more than the Father's love for Jesus ends. His love endures so we endure eternally secure. This eternal life we have by definition doesn't end, it's not a temporary life. He said *I give them eternal life, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*

These are the doctrines of grace that flow from Jn 15:16 and letters GRACE

God's sovereign choice

Radical sinfulness – our need of grace

A particular redemption

Called effectually

Enduring life

This is why GRACE is amazing, but each doctrine of grace needs applying:

G–Go (Jesus said v. 16 '*I chose you and appointed you that you should go*')

- We're not to be the frozen chosen, we're to go and make disciples
- Barclay: 'He did not choose us to live a life retired from the world, but to represent him in the world. When a knight came to the court of King Arthur, he did not come to spend the rest of his days in knightly feasting and in knightly fellowship there. He came to the king saying: "Send me out on some great task which I can do..."'⁷
- Jesus is sovereign King with all authority who says *go*-Mt 28:18-19

R–Reach out with the gospel (v. 16 says '*go and bear fruit*,' fruit that lasts)

- knowing how radical my sin problem was when He saved me gives confidence He can save others, no matter how enslaving their sin is
- Paul teaches radical depravity as much as anyone but knowing God has His elect in every nation and city encouraged him to evangelize and trust the Lord could open hearts like he did Lydia and everyone appointed to life will believe, Jews, Gentiles, and jailers in Philippi! It's why after Romans 1-9 he's passionate for the lost in Romans 10
- historically these doctrines of grace drove evangelism and missions as Calvin sent out missionaries, in the 1600s some Puritans traveled to our country driven by these truths to reach native Americans, in the 1700s Whitefield the greatest evangelist of his era passionately proclaimed these truths, the early modern missions movement was driven by men committed to these doctrines of grace, Spurgeon the great evangelist and mission-mobilizer loved and lived these truths

A-Ask God for gospel fruit (to bear lasting fruit we need prayer; v. 16 ends with *so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you*)

- in context I think prayer here is for lasting fruit in gospel ministry
- in light of His great redemption, we should ask Him for great things
- Rom 8:32 '*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*'
- One preacher has said: 'There is no mission, no fruit borne, without prayer in Jesus' name (v. 16). ... amazing harvest [is] now being reaped in many parts of God's mighty vineyard. However, we have been reminded again and again that it is where the church is living in prayer...Africa...[China]... South Korea...It may well be that the most desperate need of the American church is the recovery of fervent, believing prayer in the name of Jesus.'⁸

C-Commit to love (v. 17 says He says all this so *you will love one another*)

- It's true God calls or draws effectually but He often uses Christians who love others as part of the process as a magnet to attract others
- We spent a lot of time on love last week (one anothers) so last one:

E-Embrace sovereign grace (like v. 18 and following it'll help you endure)

- These doctrines keep us humble (like v. 5 my inability w/out Him)
- These realities should make us grateful (v.11 says joyful to the full)

Jesus says in v. 11 He's saying these things (including v. 16-17) for our joy. John Piper says our radical inability apart from Him in v. 5 is 'blindness to ... and deadness to joy; [His election in v. 16] means that the completeness of our joy in Jesus was planned for us before we ever existed; [particular redemption in v. 13, for His friends] is the assurance that indestructible joy in God is infallibly secured for us by the blood of [the cross for a joy before Him and us; that effectual] *grace* is the...power of God's love to make sure we don't hold on to suicidal pleasures, and to set us free by the sovereign power of superior delights; and that [our] *perseverance* [or enduring abiding life] is the almighty work of God to keep us, through all affliction and suffering, for an inheritance of pleasures at God's right hand forever.'⁹

George Muller understood how important these truths of God's sovereignty are in John 15, and how vital the connection is to joy in v. 11, how the joy of the Lord is our strength as we have a strong view of an Almighty Christ. He wrote '*Above all things, see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord... truly happy in God...The secret of all true effectual service is--joy in God.*'¹⁰

George Muller saw reading scripture daily and sovereign grace key to joy. He saw the doctrines of grace as key in his own ministry being fruitful in evangelism, prayerful and powerful, he was humbled by the Lord choosing and using him, he was hopeful in difficulties, death of his family members.

He wrote: 'it pleased God ... to show to me the doctrines of grace in a way in which I had not seen them before. At first I hated them ... But when it pleased God to reveal these truths [Muller called it 'like a 2nd conversion'¹¹] ... the Lord gave me to see fruit in abundance.... I delight to dwell on this, especially for the benefit of my younger fellow-believers. We must be really willing to give God all the glory ... to be content to be nothing but the instrument, giving God all the glory...not say...99 parts of the glory, and the 100th part shall be ours. No, we must give Him all...I affectionately, as an elder brother, lay it upon the hearts of my beloved young brethren, whether engaged as...Sunday-school teachers...[evangelists]...visitors, or in any other way working in the Lord's service, if they desire to see fruit resulting from their labours that they primarily aim after this...give all the honour and glory to God, if He should condescend to use them as instruments in His service'¹²

In his autobiography: 'I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption...I called election a devilish doctrine...I knew nothing about the choice of God's people...But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the word of God...I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths... As to the effect which my belief in these doctrines [of grace I saw] had on me...by the grace of God, I have walked more closely with Him since that period. My life has not been so variable, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before. And for this have I been strengthened by the Lord, in a great measure, through the instrumentality of these truths ... the electing love of God in Christ (when I have been able to realize it) has often been the means of *producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin*'¹³

How did these truths help him trust God when he didn't know how he'd pay a bill? He wrote of one as he prayed, trusted: '*How* the means are to come, I know not; but I know that God is almighty, that the hearts of all are in His hands, and that if He pleaseth to influence persons, they will send help.'¹⁴ 'Here is the great secret of success, my Christian Reader. Work with all your might; but trust not in the least in your work. Pray with all your might for the blessing of God; but work, at the same time, with all diligence.'¹⁵

Let's pray and then let's obey the rest of v. 16, as we go and bear fruit that will last, praying for help in Christ's name, loving another, as v. 17 says, for your joy, as v. 11 says. Let's love one another, as v. 17 says, remembering and relying on the love of Christ who laid down His life to make us friends!

Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah! Children of God's gracious choice ...
Till the song of His salvation makes the broken world rejoice ...
Praise the Lord, sing hallelujah! Sound His sovereign grace abroad
Till His Word is loved and honored everywhere man's feet have trod.¹⁶

¹ Another version of the GRACE acronym and other acronyms or descriptions for these doctrines of grace are found with some history at: <http://www.theopedia.com/tulip>

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1887–1888.

³ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 24 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 258–260.

⁴ Josiah Conder, "Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee."

⁵ John Wyeth, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

⁶ Jordan Kauflin, "All I Have is Christ."

⁷ William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 179.

⁸ Roger L. Fredrikson and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *John*, vol. 27, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1985), 231.

⁹ John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 73.

¹⁰ George Müller, *Jehovah Magnified: Addresses* (Bristol, England: The Bible and Tract Depot of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, 1876), 40–41.

¹¹ William Henry Harding, *The Life of George Müller: A Record of Faith Triumphant* (London; Edinburgh: Oliphants Ltd., 1914), 46.

¹² Müller, *Jehovah Magnified*, 99–101.

¹³ Harding, *The Life of George Müller: A Record of Faith Triumphant*, 46.

¹⁴ George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller*, vol. 2 (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1886), 276.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:301.

¹⁶ E. Margaret Clarkson, "Praise the Lord, Sing Hallelujah."