

Greetings church,

Henri immediately makes clear that what he truly means when he uses the word “taken” is in fact a very familiar word to those who have swam in the cultural milieu of Christianity; he means to say “chosen”. A confession. I immediately balked at the word “chosen” as a descriptor for we who are the beloved of God. I balked because there is a long history of misuse, abuse, and unorthodox understandings of the word “chosen” in Christianity. “Chosen” has been repeatedly used to infer that someone or some group becoming chosen means that others are not. This is why I balked and did not immediately feel comfortable with the word chosen. I even went so far as to, in the margins, pencil in the word “claimed”. But in the pages that follow, Henri was able to convince me that he had the right of it. “Chosen” is the correct word to use as “claimed” is limited in its utility to fully and completely explain the love of God.

Instead of balking at the word “chosen” Henri insists we must reclaim it. “But I beg you, do not surrender the world ‘chosen’ to the world. Dare to claim it as your own, even when it is constantly misunderstood.”¹ Hear how he defines “chosen” and consider applying this orthodox, wholistic, shalom based understanding in your own personal lives. “... To be chosen does not mean that others are rejected ... To be chosen as the Beloved of God is something radically different. Instead of excluding others, it includes others. Instead of rejecting others as less valuable, it accepts others in their own uniqueness. It is not a competitive but a compassionate choice.”² Can you imagine a world like this? I certainly can and it is beautiful to behold. In a world like this there is no oppression, no conflict. There is no slavery, there was never any Nazis because we cannot falsely interpret “chosen” to mean that “white” is superior to “black” or to being Jewish. There are no poor or destitute people because life is not about competing to be “chosen” and, therefore, life is not about continuing to accumulate things even at the expense of others. If you are struggling to imagine this world, Henri understands. “Maybe our minds will never understand it. Perhaps it is only our hearts that can accomplish this.”³

I recently preached on something similar to this concept. The mind is where we are deceived; where tricks are played on us by others and by our own self-doubts and inclinations towards self-deception. Henri too acknowledges this and this acknowledgment is part of what guides him back to the heart. In this acknowledgement he also offers three practical steps for getting in touch with our choseness even in the midst of both external and internal rejections.

First, he encourages us “to keep unmasking the world about [us] for what it is: manipulative, controlling, power-hungry, and, in the long run, destructive”⁴. This is going to be especially difficult for us as Americans because we have a cultural narrative that *excludes* us from these descriptors and assigns them to the rest of the world. We are honest and genuine as distinct from those who manipulate others for power. We prize freedom over all and battle against the forces that would control us. We give “power to the people” and do not hunger for it ourselves; we have civil “servants”. We are constructive, spreading liberty and democracy throughout the globe thereby countering the destructive tendencies of those who truly are manipulative, controlling, and power-hungry and seeking to spread their negative influences across the globe. This is our cultural

¹ Nouwen, Henri J.M. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. The Crossroad Publishing Company; New York, NY: 1992. p.56

² *ibid*, pp.54 & 55

³ *ibid*, p.56

⁴ *ibid*, p.59

narrative but alas, it is in conflict with how we actually operate and function in the world. The reason this is going to be so difficult for us to accept and work through is because our cultural narrative speaks to our feelings. Our feelings of nobility and justness and “choseness” that sets us apart from, and above, the rest of the world. Listen, however, to what Henri has to say about said feelings. “These feelings, strong as they may be, are not telling me the truth about myself.”⁵ And I would dare add, your feelings might not be telling you the truth about the United States of America no matter who happens to be in power. This is especially important guidance today because I observe so many people to be making choices and decisions *not* based on rational, well thought out plans of action, but making decisions and choices through a lens of, especially, the feeling of fear. Rejecting these falsehoods is what will allow you to embrace the truth of your choseness understood in its proper, Christological, biblical, and orthodox context.

His second suggestion for getting in touch with our choseness is to look for, and then associate ourselves, with people and places who are telling the truth about our identity as chosen. The truth as referred to in everything in this writing to this point. We all, the whole of creation, are loved. “The limited, sometimes broken, love of those who share our humanity can often point us to the truth of who we are: precious in God’s eyes.”⁶ Surrounding ourselves with like-minded people has both positive and negative consequences, much like any other choice or decision we make. When we surround ourselves with lies, deceptions, close-mindedness, and conspiracy theories, we fall further down the rabbit hole towards wonderland. When we surround ourselves with truth and open-mindedness, we more clearly see ourselves, one another, and the world as everything truly is.

His third and final suggestion is to embrace gratitude. “Gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness that you are not at ‘accident,’ but a divine choice.”⁷ Accepting this truth about ourselves inevitably leads to us being able to accept this truth about others. Gratitude teaches us to find the positive, to find the truth of God, and to identify, and disavow, the negative.

He concludes that the truth of choseness, the Christological, biblical, and orthodox truth, cannot help but improve our relationships with one another. “Instead of making us feel that we are better, more precious or valuable than others, our awareness of being chosen opens our eyes to the choseness of others. That is the great joy of being chosen: the discovery that others are chosen as well.”⁸ When I see myself as chosen by God, by no merit of my own, that is good news to be shared. Because what it means is that others may also be chosen by no merit of their own. When we are all chosen by grace, there is no need to separate ourselves from one another. We recognize that “it is impossible to compete for God’s love. God’s love is a love that includes all people - each one in his or her uniqueness”.⁹ And *that* is the good news of the gospel. Amen.

In Christ’s Service,
Pastor Eddie

⁵ Nouwen, Henri J.M. Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World. The Crossroad Publishing Company; New York, NY: 1992. p.59

⁶ *ibid*, p.60

⁷ *ibid*, p.60

⁸ *ibid*, p.63

⁹ *ibid*, p.64