**We are *chosen*.** Note that we were chosen “in Christ before the foundation of the world” (v. 4). Paul’s intent is to remind the Ephesian church that all people, not just Jews, are chosen. While the Jews referred to themselves as the “chosen people,” now, in Jesus Christ, the circle is widened, the boat is bigger, and the tent is expanded. We, too, are chosen. Paul explains that that God has a sweeping and expansive plan for the unfolding history of the world, and that the Ephesians (and we today) occupy a central role in this plan.

Specifically, Paul says we are chosen “to be holy and blameless before [God] in love” (v. 4). These two words (intercardinal points?) might sound like synonyms, but they are quite different in meaning. We were chosen to be *holy*, that is, morally pure, without blemishes or fault lines. The word includes the idea of “separation.” Just as the Jews set apart certain items, singling them out for temple worship in God’s holy sanctuary, so we are chosen and set apart as instruments for the glory of God. Our bodies, Paul says, are temples of God, and we should treat them as holy (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). This is an important biblical vector, as we strive to live a lifestyle that conforms to the highest possible moral standard.

To be *blameless*, however, is something different. “Blameless” is a juridical term that means that we are chosen to live in justice and fairness. Being blameless means to be innocent of any wrongdoing and without guilt. It does not mean we are perfect people, only that our motives are pure. The path we walk must be wide enough for others to walk with us without fear of being abused. We are chosen to live a spotless (blameless) life as an example to others. A blameless life reflects our Heavenly Parent and points others to God.

**We are not only God’s chosen people; we are God’s *children*.** To be called God’s children is an extremely personal thing. We are not children by *nature*, but by *adoption*, says the apostle. This dovetails with the concept of being chosen. All children are special, but an adopted child is chosen.Do children with loving parents worry about their future? Do they wonder how they will survive? Do they even bother themselves with these types of adult concerns? No! They have complete and utter confidence that their earthly parents will provide for their needs.

Jesus references this concept in the “Sermon on the Mount” when he says: “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’…indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:31-32). Why God cares for us is expressed, by two intercardinal points: “according to the good pleasure of [God’s] will” and “to the praise of [God’s] glorious grace” (vv. 5-6). God chooses us and adopts us as God’s children because it is God’s “good pleasure” to do it! God is filled with love for us, and it brings God joy and happiness to include us in God’s family and plan for creation. Our inclusion, furthermore, brings praise to God’s name. As expressions of God’s “glorious grace,” we (God’s children) enhance God’s reputation as a God of love and mercy and grace and justice when we act in these same ways. Out good behavior reflects well on our God, drawing others into closer relationship with God, into the family.

**Redeemed and Forgiven.** Now to the *east-west* cardinal points. We are *redeemed,* and we are *forgiven* solely because God’s grace is freely bestowed on us in Christ Jesus (vv. 6-8; see also 2:8-10). For as the psalmist says in Psalm 103: “As far as the east is from the west, so far [God] removes our transgressions from us” (v. 12). Although in ruin because of sin, and although we are broken and dysfunctional people, through Christ we are made new and usable again. Everything ugly and unsightly is blotted out. Our offenses against a holy God are removed and forgotten. By God’s amazing grace, it is never too soon to begin again as redeemed and forgiven, chosen children of God! And here is an intercardinal point: we are redeemed and forgiven for a purpose, which is to bring glory and praise to God (v. 12).

The four cardinal points of the Ephesian compass are the north-south vectors of our status as *chosen/children* of God, and the east-west points of *redemption* and *forgiveness* which locate us squarely within God’s vast plan of extravagant grace and salvation. Everything we are and hope to be falls within these four vectors, which in themselves encompass God’s eternal plan for us.

**Using the Compass.** But a compass can’t help you if it’s buried in your backpack or gathering dust on a shelf. Here are some important reminders about using your compass. *Trust the compass*; it will not lie to you. Trust it, even when your instincts or preferences are suggesting a different path. You have this compass to guide you and to ensure you will have the correct heading so that you will reach the place you need to be, which is the “joy of our true eternal home.” Trust the compass to get you there.

*Consult the compass frequently*. In this is a crazy, upside-down, topsy-turvy, goofy and dangerous world, the boundaries, fault lines, mile posts, and road conditions are always changing. Consult your moral-biblical compass frequently to make certain you are where you think you are and, more importantly, where God wants you to be.

*Be aware of variations and deviations*. The magnetic north of a compass is not true north. Professional navigators know to adjust for this variation. Moreover, shifts and irregularities of the Earth’s magnetic field can alter the position of the magnetic north. Ships and trucks that carry enormous amounts of ferrous metals find deviations when navigating across oceans and over roads. Recognize these deviations and adjust accordingly. Responding to variations means that we cannot be too judgmental of others who seem to be following a path different from ours. They may be headed in the right general direction but on a slightly divergent theological or political path. We must be mindful of our own steps and tone down our rhetoric about the paths of others.

On the other hand, we must remember that it is easy to think we are on the right path when, in reality, we are not even headed on a magnetic north heading, let alone a true north heading. We easily fool ourselves, putting false idols, false images and attractive destinations ahead of the righteous path on which we should be traveling. The prophet Jeremiah addresses this: “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?” (17:9). The answer comes immediately: “I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings” (17:10).

Which brings us to the final note about using our compass: *Always be aware of our True North*, *Jesus Christ*. It is no coincidence that Jesus is mentioned (directly or indirectly) as many as 16 times in this passage. He is our True North. There is nothing truer than Jesus. If we are following in the shadow of the Son, we need not worry about directional issues. He is steering us right and leading us home.

In Paul’s letters, he suggests that we will go experience times of trouble when we feel utterly lost. We will be in a soupy fog that brings progress to a standstill. We might be in a sandstorm of confusion and despair. We may not have a clue as to which way is north. The beautiful thing about being in a meaningful relationship with Jesus is that we will never lose our compass. Our compass, which is our faith in Jesus, can never be taken from us. The points of our faith have brought millions of pilgrims over millennia safely into harbor. In even the most confusing of times, it will do the same for us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for Your guidance. Forgive us from getting ahead of Your plans, and help us to know when to stop and get our bearings, listening for your gentle direction. Your ways are perfect. Empower us by Your Spirit to follow Jesus, our True North. Amen.

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**Our Moral Compass**

Sunday, January 2, 2022 Ephesians 1:3-14

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In October 2006, a German man ignored a series of warning signs and drove his car into a giant sand pile off a highway near Hamburg. Why? Because his GPS told him to! In 2011, three young women escaped from a sinking SUV after driving the rental car down a boat launch and into a lake near Seattle. How did this happen? You guessed it! GPS directed them to go that way. A limo driver in Salzburg, Austria, looking to make up some lost time, drove down a flight of stairs…because his GPS told him it was a shortcut. Some crazy and potentially dangerous things happen when we rely too heavily on our GPS systems.

As good as GPS is (and it’s getting better all the time) there is something to be said for the low-tech compass, like the little hand-held compass we used as kids in scouting or at summer camp. This *magnetic compass*, with a needle that rotated on a pin,uses the Earth’s magnetism to orient you northward. A *gyrocompass* has a spinning gyroscope that works in conjunction with the Earth’s axis of rotation to point to north. This type of compass is often used on ships and aircraft. A *solar compass* uses the sun as a navigational tool. Then there is the *moral compass* which, you might say, uses the Son of God as a directional tool. It is a compass that points True North and keeps our steps on a good and trustworthy path. A compass helps us travel with confidence in the right direction.

According to one definition, the points of a compass are “the vectors by which planet-based directions are conventionally defined.” There are four cardinal points on a compass: north, east, south, and west. Between these cardinal points are the *intercardinal* points: northeast, southeast, southwest, and northwest. These can be divided as well, until you have a compass with as many as 128 points! For our purposes, we will stick to the four cardinal points.

**Four Cardinal Points.** Although there are many points of the Ephesian compass, the cardinal points help us understand our place in the world and in our relationship with God. We need not be confused as to who we are, and who is directing our steps. The apostle Paul provides the *north-south* points on our faith-compass: *chosen* and *children*. The Earth rotates on its north-south axis, so it is no stretch to suggest that being chosen and being children of God are the pivotal points on our moral and theological compass.