

# Blessings From God the Father

Ephesians 1:3-6

You'll remember that last week we said that verse 3 was the beginning of one long sentence that ends in verse 14. In those 12 verses, Paul describes for us many of those spiritual blessings that God has provided for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we're going to look at just three verses that describe those blessings that God, the Father gives us in Christ.

**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,**

**4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,**

**5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,**

**6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.**

There is no way that we can deal with this text this morning without coming face to face with a topic that has been the source of much debate among Biblical scholars, pastors and Christians over the years – the relationship between God's election and predestination and man's free will. Or perhaps a more accurate description would be the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

Over the years, two basic camps have developed on this issue. On one side are the Calvinists, a group that is named after John Calvin, an early 16th century French theologian who was instrumental in the Protestant reformation. This set of beliefs is also referred to as "reformed theology".

Calvin's followers organized this set of beliefs into what are known as the five points of Calvinism. We don't have nearly enough time this morning to even begin to tackle a theological system that generally takes a semester or two to cover in seminary. Although it is a great simplification, for purposes of our time together this morning, we can look at Calvinism as having an emphasis on the doctrines of election and predestination. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the process of salvation.

In the other camp are the Arminians, who as you might expect get their name from their founder, Jacobus Arminius. Arminius was a Dutch pastor and theologian in the late 16th and early 17th century who disputed many of Calvin's conclusions. His most well-known follower was John Wesley, who became the leader of the Methodist movement. Again, we can't even begin to discuss all the beliefs of that theological system this morning. They also believe that salvation is by grace alone, but their chief difference with the Calvinists is that they believe that God's election and predestination is conditional upon faith in Jesus. They tend to focus more on the role of man's free will in the process of salvation.

My purpose in bringing up these two camps this morning is not to promote one view or the other. And it is certainly not to create any kind of division or conflict in our church. I don't want us to become like the group of theologians who were discussing the tension between predestination and free will. Things became so heated that the group broke up into two opposing factions.

But one man, not knowing which to join, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he joined the predestination group. "Who sent you here?" they asked. "No one sent me," he replied. "I came of my own free will." "Free will!" they exclaimed. "You can't join us! You belong with the other group!"

So he followed their orders and went to the other clique. There someone asked, "When did you decide to join us?" The young man replied, "Well, I didn't really decide--I was sent here." "Sent here!" they shouted. "You can't join us unless you have decided by your own free will!"

What I want to do this morning is to just look at the Scriptures themselves and develop our theology from the Bible itself.

The Bible clearly teaches both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in salvation. It is clear that man must choose God to be saved. Jesus and others implored people to repent and trust in the Lord. Rom.10:13 says, "**For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.**" We are commanded in Mk.16:15 "**to preach the gospel to every creature.**" Evangelism is all about helping men choose Christ.

At the same time, the Bible clearly teaches that God chooses us first. Jesus said in John 6:44, "**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.**" Have you ever seen those large electromagnets in salvage yards? They use them to pick up and sort scrap metal. God's choosing of people, electing people, is drawing people in something like that. In fact, we see it throughout the Bible.

God chose the nation of Israel above all other peoples. Isa.45:4 says, "**For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.**" Deut.7:7-8 says, "**The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you.**"

God's angels are chosen. 1 Tim.5:21 calls them "**elect angels.**" 1 Pet.2:6 says that Jesus was "**elect.**" Jn.15:16 points out that the apostles didn't choose Jesus, but He chose them.

God's people today, the body of Christ is elect, chosen by God. 2 Tim.1:9 says He has "**saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.**"

Acts 13:48 says, "**As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**"

Paul wrote in 2 Tim.2:10, **"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."**

Paul gave thanks for election in 2 Thess.2:13, **"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth."**

The Bible teaches that God has sovereignly chosen those who would be saved *and* it teaches that man must choose God in order to be saved. Many of us can't seem to reconcile this in our own minds. But Jesus had no problem with it.

Jesus plainly stated (John 6:65), **"Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."** No one can means, no one is able. Clearly, the Father did not grant this to everyone, or Jesus' statement would be needless.

Look at Matthew 11:27, Jesus also said:

**"All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."**

Knowing the Father depends on the Son of God choosing to reveal Him to the individual, which He does not do for everyone. But, what are the very next words out of Jesus' mouth? **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Mt. 11:28). Jesus saw no contradiction between saying, "No one can know or come, unless I will it; therefore, come!" Neither should we!

This passage is all about what God has done for us. And in these three verses, there are three verbs that describe the actions that God the Father has taken in the lives of His children in order to pour out spiritual blessings into their lives. So we'll use those three actions as an outline for our study of this passage this morning.

### **I. Appointed to be holy (1:4).**

The first way that God gave us spiritual blessings was that He chose us. The verb "chose" is a reflexive verb. It means that God picked us for His own purposes, for Himself. In other words, our salvation is totally and completely a result of what God has already done for us.

My first reaction to seeing that God has chosen me was to think of it in terms that I can understand. It took me back to the schoolyard when we would choose-up teams for a game. I'm sure many of you remember those days – and maybe not too fondly. A couple of kids would be designated as captains and then they would proceed to pick the other kids that they wanted on their team. Usually the biggest, fastest, strongest, and most well liked were picked first.

But that's not the way God chooses. God doesn't look at us and pick out the best or the brightest or the most athletic. In fact, His choice is not based at all on any of the qualities in our lives. That's very obvious from this verse:

#### **A. God chose us in Christ. (1:4a)**

The first thing we see is that we were chosen **"in Him"**. The "Him" here obviously refers to Jesus Christ. God chooses us, not based on our own good works, but based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Spurgeon put it this way: "God called us in Christ. He justified us in Christ. He sanctified us in Christ. He will perfect us in Christ. He will glorify us in Christ. We have everything in Christ, and we have nothing apart from Christ."

#### **B. God chose us from eternity past. (1:4b)**

The other thing we see is that we were chosen **"before the foundation of the world."** That means that before Gen.1:1, before there was anything but God, He knew you and me personally. He looked forward to when we would be born. He knew that we would be born again into His kingdom. He knew that we would rule and reign with Him forever! That means that God chose us before we ever had the opportunity to do either good or evil in our lives.

Spurgeon has an interesting comment writing that, "If God hadn't chosen me before the foundation of the world, He certainly wouldn't choose me now!"

Ray Stedman considering the significance of "Chosen in him before the foundation of the world!" asks...

Do you see what that does for our sense of identity as Christians? We are not afterthoughts in God's working. We are not accidental members of his body. There are no second class citizens in the church of Jesus Christ; we are all equal, chosen of the Father, selected to be members of his family, added to the new creation, the new order that God is producing in this world. What a fantastic privilege! It is not because of anything in us, as we'll see in a moment, but because of everything in him

#### **C. God chose us to be Holy. (1:4c)**

Some people see the doctrine of election as an excuse to do whatever we want. The truth is God never chose us to remain in sin. He chose us to pursue a holy, blameless lifestyle. Although we may not always achieve it, a true Christian wants a life of holiness and blamelessness. Kent Hughes has written:

If your life is characterized by a pattern of conscious sin, you very likely are not a Christian. If some of your most cherished thoughts are hatreds, if you are determined not to forgive, you may not be a true believer. If you are a committed materialist who finds that your greatest joys are self-indulgence – clothing your body with lavish outfits, having all your waking thoughts devoted to house, cars, clothing, and comforts – you may not be a Christian. If you are a sensualist who is addicted to pornography– and you think it's okay – you may very well not be a Christian, regardless of how many times you have "gone forward" and mouthed

the sinners prayer. Election results in holiness, but the process begins now (Hughes, pp.25-26).

Spurgeon comments..."We are chosen, not because we are holy, but that we may be made holy."

God chose us to be holy and without blame before Him in love.

## **II. Adopted as His sons (1:5).**

God predestined us to be part of His family because it gives Him pleasure.

### **A. We are Adopted because of His Love (v.4d).**

1. Not only has God chosen us, He has **"predestined us to adoption as sons."**
2. Notice the last two words in v.4, **"in love."** Some of your translations have this phrase belonging to v.5 more than v.4. That makes a lot of sense to me. It was **"in love"** that He adopted us.
4. It was in the ultimate act of love that God from the **"foundation of the world"** looked down through time and **"chose us"** to be His own special people. It was in love that He determined beforehand to adopt us into His forever family and invited us to call Him Abba, "Father" (2:4-5).

### **B. We are Adopted through His Predetermined Plan (v.5a).**

1. God **"predestined us to adoption as sons."** In verse 4, we looked at the fact of God's election. Here in verse 5, we discover the destiny that comes with that election. When God elects us, He predestines us. That word just means that He determines in advance what our destiny will be. And the destiny of every person that God has chosen is that they will become a member of His family. He not only chose us from eternity past, but He predetermined our place in His family.

A young mother wrote: I stayed with my parents for several days after the birth of our first child. One afternoon I remarked to my mother that it was surprising our baby had dark hair since both my husband and I are fair. She said, "Well, your daddy has black hair." "But, Mama, that doesn't matter because I'm adopted." With an embarrassed smile, she said the most wonderful words I've ever heard, "I always forget."

Later on in Ephesians, Paul is going to write about how all of us are initially born into this world separated from God. None of us are naturally born into His family. Therefore the only way we can enter into God's family is to be "born again" spiritually as Jesus describes in John 3. Or another picture that both Paul and John use to describe this process is that we have to be adopted by God as part of His family. John describes our need for adoption in his gospel:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12,13.

Since we're not naturally born into God's family the only way we can become part of that family is through adoption. And everyone that God chooses He also adopts as part of His family. And one of the things that happens when we become part of that family is that God, as our Father, works to make us more like Him and like His Son:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.  
Romans 8:29.

### **C. We are Adopted for His Pleasure (v.5b).**

1. What was God's goal in adopting us? V.5 says it was "according to the good pleasure of His will." It pleased the Lord to bring us into His family.

The fact that our destiny is to be part of God's family is exciting enough. But look at the last part of this verse. We've been adopted into God's family "**according to the good pleasure of his will.**" Do you understand what God is saying here? He has adopted into His family because it gives Him pleasure. Can you believe that? God chooses me apart from anything I can do on my own, He gives me a destiny that includes being a part of His family and that gives *Him* pleasure? I understand how that gives me pleasure, but I'm totally blown away by the fact that it also gives God pleasure.

### **D. We are Adopted for His Praise (v.6).**

Our adoption brings "**praise to the glory of His grace by which he made us accepted** [lit. "begraced us"] **in the Beloved.**" The fact that we deserve nothing, but God has graced us with "every spiritual blessing" brings praise to His name.

### **III. Accepted in the Beloved (1:6).**

God graced us so that He can receive glory.

In a sense, this message this morning has been primarily for those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. And when we understand just how blessed we are to have been chosen by God to be holy and blameless through Jesus Christ; when we realize that our destiny is to be part of God's family and that God takes pleasure in that; when we comprehend that God has poured out all His grace into our lives; how can we help but humble ourselves before Him and give Him praise and glory!

But maybe you're here this morning and you've never made that decision. And maybe you're asking this morning – "Am I one of God's chosen?" I believe that the very fact that you're asking that question is evidence that God is drawing you to Himself. If that's the case, please don't leave here today before talking to me. You can do that right now.