

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [Eph 1:3-6 ESV](#)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

Paul begins his theological teaching with praise to God. Jesus taught "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mat 12:34). This is frequently evident in Paul's letters. As he writes about what God has done, or as he thinks about what he has to share, he bursts forth in praise to God, as if he can't contain himself (cf. [Rom 7:24-25](#), [Rom 11:33](#), [1Co 15:57](#), [2Co 9:15](#), [1Ti 1:17](#)). This is the natural outflow of what has filled his heart.

This would seem to be in contrast to many today who think that theology is dry, boring, unnecessary and even divisive. These people tend towards "experiential" Christianity. They seek, even require, an experience that touches their emotions, but may be devoid of any Biblical basis, and therefore open to deception (cf. [2Ti 4:3-4](#)). This is foreign to Paul's thinking. For him, theology is the foundation of his Christian experience, and the wonderful truths of the faith, the great doctrines, stir him to praise and joy that he can barely contain. Let us be careful to follow Paul's example, and have a foundation for our faith that is built on a knowledge and understanding of Truth that in turn stirs our passion for Jesus Christ. Christianity should never be dry and emotionless. That misrepresents a God of blessing, abundance, joy and peace. Paul again refers to the Fatherhood of God, this time as "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This touches on our relationship to Jesus Christ as our brother ([Heb 2:11-13](#)). While Paul doesn't develop the doctrine of Adoption here, it is clearly part of his thinking. Adoption was a common event in ancient times, with no stigma attached to it. It was a legal process that provided the adopted son with all the rights and benefits of one who was naturally born. It provided, by Roman law, entitlement to the father's name, possession and family rights. The adopted son could even inherit the father's position of Emperor if he was chosen by the ruler of the Roman Empire. The father was in turn entitled to his adopted son's property. The adopted son could also adopt brothers, allowing them to share his privileges (cf. [Joh 8:36](#)).

The doctrine of Adoption is a wonderful encouragement to us today as believers. God has acted in gracious love to bring us into His household. We now share in all the benefits of that familial relationship, such as the right to call God "Father" ([Joh 20:17](#), [Gal 4:6-7](#), [Rom 8:15-16](#)), conformity to Christ ([Rom 8:29](#)) and renewal in the image of God ([Col 3:10](#)). We also are beneficiaries of God's special love and favour ([1Jn 3:1](#), [Eph 5:1](#)), we have the love of God within us ([Joh 17:26](#)), unrestricted access to God without fear ([Mat 6:8-9](#), [Rom 8:15](#), [Rom 8:26-27](#)), freedom from debt ([Rom 8:12-17](#)), provision and protection ([Mat 6:31-33](#), [Mat 10:29-30](#)), fatherly discipline ([Heb 12:5-8](#)), and a heavenly inheritance ([1Pe 1:3-4](#), [Rev 21:7](#)). As yet, our adoption is incomplete. When Christ returns, we will experience redemption of our bodies also ([Rom 8:23](#)).

The doctrine of Adoption goes hand-in-hand with the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God and of Election. God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy ([Rom 9:15](#), [Exo 33:19](#)). It is entirely *His* choice as to whom He adopts as sons. This gives us great assurance and certainty. God does not change His mind ([Num 23:1](#), [Heb 13:8](#), [Jas 1:17](#)), and His gifts and calling are without repentance ([Rom 11:29](#)). If it were up

to us mere humans to ensure our salvation, we would all be lost. Quite apart from our inability to satisfy God and pay the debt we owe to Him, we are governed so much by our emotions and circumstances that none of us is able to be truly and completely holy and righteous consistently. At no time, therefore, could we be confident in our final salvation. In addition, the effort we would have to make to try to remain righteous would exhaust us, and lead us into legalism and arrogance as it did with some of the Pharisees (cf [Luk 18:9-14](#)) which would immediately exclude us from salvation. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift ([2Co 9:15](#))! Because it depends not on us, but on Him Who is able, it is also certain.

This adoption was a choice God made before the foundation of the world, from eternity. Our experience is that there was a point in time when we were born-again. Prior to that time, we were unsaved, destined for an eternity in hell. But at a particular time, we responded to God's call and were saved. This is our temporal experience. From God's perspective, though, we were always going to be saved. There was never a time in God's "imagination" when we were not chosen by Him. Therefore, because God's decrees and choices are guaranteed, so is/was/will be our salvation.

Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places

The letter to the Ephesians contains a long list of spiritual blessings. These blessings include being chosen (v.4), made holy and blameless (v.4), predestination (v.5), adoption (v.5), grace (v.6), redemption (v.7), forgiveness (v.7), the revelation of His will (v.9), an inheritance (v.11), the seal of the Holy Spirit (v.13), and more. Paul tells the church that they have been blessed with *every* spiritual blessing in heavenly places. While he lists many of them here, there must be many more that he didn't have room for, or that are just so wonderful that they are beyond our comprehension. The experience of heaven is a spiritual blessing which we cannot fathom in this earthly existence, but one we will enjoy in eternity. Who can tell what abundant blessings we are still to receive or comprehend? The Law had its blessings for obedience (cf [Deu 28:1-14](#)). It cautioned, "If you do this, then you will be blessed." How much greater then, the blessings of God which are based on the foundation of, "Since *He* (Christ Jesus) *has* done, you will be blessed." God is infinitely generous, and so must have many more blessings for us yet. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

With this sort of foundation and encouragement, is it any wonder Jesus would have reason to commend the church at Ephesus for their work, their endurance and their discernment ([Rev 2:1-3](#)). Paul had done a good job of establishing this church with good doctrine and with great love. John Calvin said, "Those who perceive in themselves discoveries of the Divine goodness, so full and absolutely perfect, and who make them the subject of earnest meditation, will never embrace new doctrines, by which the very grace they feel so powerfully in themselves is thrown into the shade."

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world

This brings us again to the doctrine of Election. It is inescapable in Paul's writings that God has elected (chosen) some and not others. This is an unpopular teaching in many circles today. Many would claim that it is inconsistent with the love of God, and unfair of God, to choose some and condemn others. But this perspective does not tell the full story of God's nature or choices. God is love, clearly, but God is also just. Paul deals with accusations of injustice and unfairness in [Rom 9:11-32](#) and [Rom 11:26-36](#).

There are some who would argue that election is based on God having advanced knowledge of who would have faith to be saved. This, however, flies in the face of Scripture. It makes salvation a result of our action, therefore of works. It also makes the Creator subservient to His creatures, and gives His creatures the power to resist, thwart, even negate the Creator's will. While this may seem desirable for those who want to exalt man, it is far from the teaching of the Word, and greatly diminishes God. This is the same God who can turn a king's heart like water in His hand ([Pro 21:1](#)). The same God whose words will accomplish His purposes ([Isa 55:11](#)). It is inconceivable that mere man could prevent God achieving His goals and plans. Should man have that power over God, then God is no longer God, and man now is. There is no question that the doctrine of Election is not one which we can easily balance with the clear word of Scripture that tells us that man is responsible for his choices and actions, even while God has ordained that certain actions will be. Judas may be a good example of this ([Mat 26:21-25](#), [Luk 22:21-22](#), [Joh 17:12](#), [Act 1:15-20](#)). It was fore-ordained that Judas would betray Jesus, and that the devil would enter into him, yet Judas was held responsible for his actions. It is a difficult concept for us to understand, but we must rely on the revealed Word of the Lord, rather than human speculation and ideas with which we feel comfortable. There is not a human being living who could claim honestly to know and understand the ways of God ([Isa 55:8-9](#)). At some point, if we are to maintain our own and God's integrity, must admit and accept the tension of this. Many things are held in tension in Scripture, and our duty is to acknowledge our lack of understanding, choose to accept Truth as it is revealed, and allow God to be God. Further, any God who could be fully understood by mere mortal intellect such as our own would not be God at all, but merely a projection of our own selves, and a weak one at that. No, Election and Responsibility do not contradict each other in the mind, the plans and the purposes of God. Rather, they are the prerogative of a supreme, sovereign Creator.

We must, however, be careful not to slip into fatalism as we try to understand and accept Election. God still employs *means* to accomplish His purposes. Man is still responsible to preach the Word and to respond to the Word. God in His infinite wisdom has chosen these means to save, and no man will have an excuse for not responding to the call to salvation. Man is still responsible to "work out his salvation." This particular phrase "*even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*" is a source of encouragement and confidence for us as believers. The choices of God are not "spur of the moment" choices. God is not suddenly surprised by a turn of events that He didn't expect. He is not dependent on us having warm feelings towards Him. No, He chose us *before* the foundation of the world. Before any act of creation, before any mind or intellect existed outside of Himself, He chose us. What security, what peace, what confidence in a powerful and loving God that phrase should give us!

That we should be holy and blameless before him.

This election was not without purpose. The intended, the guaranteed result, is that we should be holy and blameless before Him. There are many who will justly accuse us of wrong-doing, and attribute blame to us. We cannot deny that we are anything but completely upright in our actions and attitudes toward our fellow man. But Paul doesn't claim here that we are. What he *does* claim, and it would be almost too wonderful to believe if it were not clearly written here, is that we are holy and blameless before *Him*.

Paul here touches on the doctrine of Justification. Justification is the judicial act of God, by which He pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts

them as righteous in the eyes of the law. There are a number of important factors we need to consider:

1. All the sins of the believer are forgiven, past present and future. None are retained. See [Psa 103:12](#), [Jer 31:34](#), [Heb 8:12](#), [Heb 10:17](#).
2. The righteousness of Christ is credited to the believer's account. This means that the perfect obedience, both passive and active, that Jesus Christ displayed in His earthly life is considered, legally before God, to be the perfect obedience of the believer.
3. Therefore, the claims of God for complete obedience to the law (cf [Rom 2:13](#), [Jas 2:10](#)) are met in those who are justified. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but declared to be fulfilled completely and totally.
4. This means that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (cf [Rom 8:1](#)), not on the basis of our obedience, but on the basis of *Christ's* obedience.
5. Hence, we no longer have to strive to achieve obedience by our own efforts (cf [Heb 4:9-10](#)). We are now entitled to all the advantages and rewards that come from perfect obedience to the law (cf [Rom 5:1-10](#), [Rom 10:3-9](#)).
6. At no time will we be subject to the condemnation of God. Were it possible for our justification to fail, or to be used up, then the only conclusion we could draw is that the Cross has failed. God forbid! Should Christ's death be insufficient to satisfy the wrath of God against mankind, then there is no hope for anyone, no cause for peace, no reason for joy, but only abject terror and eternal judgement. Further, the Word of God would not be words of life, but vicious taunts and mockery. This could never be in keeping with the God described in the Bible.
7. The same act which secures our justification also secures our sanctification, so therefore does not lead to an abuse of the privileges of grace by wanton disobedience (cf [Rom 6:2-7](#)).
8. The natural outworking of this is good works that are pleasing to God (cf [Rom 7:6](#)).
9. The basis for accounting our sin to Christ and His righteousness to us is our union with Him. Christ is our representative (our federal head in old terminology) before God. In the same way that Adam's sin was accounted to us since he was the federal head of all mankind, Christ's righteousness was accounted to those who would believe. Again, this all stems from the boundless grace of God, not from our works, lest we should boast ([Rom 3:19-25](#)).

What a burden has been lifted from the shoulders of believers! No more striving, no more shame, no more guilt. We are free to enjoy God and to serve Him with confidence and gratitude.

This act of justifying us in the sight of God provides the basis for our sanctification. No longer are we striving to be good, wrestling with our fallen nature to achieve what is beyond our capacity and ability to achieve. Now we simply live out what has been done in and for us. No longer is sin our master, that we should live in it. We are now free to live in righteousness (see [Rom 6:1-23](#)).

In love he predestined us

Adoption, election, justification, sanctification, predestination, redemption. The great and historic doctrines of grace are all to be found here in the first several verses of Ephesians. We have briefly touched on predestination earlier, but here it is reinforced that God's choice of us is previously decided *by God* out of His love for us. The doctrine of Predestination is of fundamental importance in understanding the nature of

God, the will of God in relationship to fallen man, the Church, and eternity. Predestination is the free, unforced choice of God to select certain individuals out of all of His creation, and throughout all of history, to be saved and reconciled to Himself, with the guarantee of an eternity with Him. This choice is not dependent on any external factor, whether that be works, faith, or worthiness, but is totally and completely free and independent of those factors. It is a choice that arises from within the heart of God Himself, because of His love, and His good pleasure.

God is completely righteous in His choice of some individuals and not others, and cannot be charged with unfairness or favouritism. As sovereign Creator of all things, He has the right to choose some, and reject others as He sees fit (cf. [Rom 9:20-23](#)), and who of mere humanity can argue with His choice?

Predestination is consistent with God's actions throughout Biblical history. The New Testament understanding of predestination is founded in the earliest history of mankind. God created Adam and Eve, knowing full well that they would sin and plunge the world into rebellion against Him. He chose Abram, from a family of idol worshippers, to be the channel of His blessing and the father of many nations ([Gen 12:1-3](#), [Gen 17:4-5](#)). He chose Jacob, not Esau before they were born, and in contravention of custom (cf. [Rom 9:10-13](#)). He chose the tribe of Israel ([Deu 7:7-8](#), [1Sa 12:22](#)), then the tribe of Judah out of all the tribes of Israel ([Psa 78:67-68](#)), He chose David, not any of his brothers ([2Ch 6:6](#)), He chose Jeremiah as His prophet before his birth ([Jer 1:4-5](#)), and we could go on. Jesus tells us that many are *called*, but few are *chosen* ([Mat 22:14](#)), and reminded His followers Who chose who ([Joh 15:16](#)). Paul was under no illusions about the source of his own calling ([Gal 1:15](#)). He has even chosen some for destruction ([Pro 16:4](#), [Rom 9:21-22](#)) as is His right as Creator.

Any attempt to force predestination to fit any other mould than that God has chosen certain individuals entirely and purely because *He desires to*, is unbiblical and lays a foundation for misunderstanding many other doctrines, and ultimately may even lead to heresy. Doctrine is important, regardless of whether or not people are interested in it. Our beliefs shape our understanding of God and of the world, and therefore shape our responses to God and our actions in the world. Paul warned Timothy to watch his life and his doctrine closely, because the two are inextricably linked ([1Ti 4:16](#)).

This predestination is *in love*. It flows out of the heart of God, not out of the merit of man. Love, even while a characteristic of the nature of God, is a choice which He makes (cf. [Rom 9:13](#)). The first time the word "love" is used in the Bible is in what may be a surprising context, but which prepares us for our understanding of love throughout Scripture. There is a principle of Biblical interpretation that the first mention of any concept lays a foundation for understanding later uses of the concept. God told Abraham, "*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*" (Gen 22.2). No doubt, this was a heart-wrenching thing for Abraham to have to do. But right from the outset, we see that in love is an element of sacrifice. The ultimate fulfillment of this is found in the life and death of Jesus. God declared, in similar terms, "*You are my beloved Son. With You I am well pleased*" (Luk 3:22). There was never any illusion with God that His love could be expressed without sacrifice. He knew from before creation what the cost would be. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (Joh 3:16). It is often thought that the words "so loved" mean "loved so much, or really, really loved," which while a true statement, is not the full meaning of it. Rather, it properly means "loved in this way, or in this manner."

God loved *in this way*; He gave His only Son to be brutally executed that He might save those who would believe in Him (see [Rom 5:8](#)). And far from the wrath of God being aroused by His Son's execution, this was actually the means by which His wrath has been averted, being fully absorbed and turned away by Jesus on behalf of His chosen ones. Herein is another great old doctrine; the doctrine of Propitiation. Simply put, this doctrine states that the wrath of God is rightly directed towards humanity, but the action of Jesus Christ in accepting the punishment of God on our behalf, turns away, or absorbs, all of the wrath of God. All that remains for those who believe is God's blessing and delight towards them. An illustration may help to clarify this. Imagine that the wrath of God was an ocean of highly toxic, deadly poison liquid being poured out on humanity. Jesus is the sponge that soaks up every drop of that poison, before it touches His chosen ones. In the process, the poison kills Him, but there is not a single drop left to harm His own. This act of propitiation is only beneficial for the Elect, those who have been predestined for adoption as sons through Him. For those who have not been chosen, the poison is still being poured out on them (see [Rom 2:5-8](#)), but for those who are chosen, there is no more wrath, but now reconciliation. What a wonderful thing is the love of God!

For adoption as sons

While we have already touched on adoption, it may be beneficial to consider Sonship. Ancient households sometimes had two classes of people within them; the immediate family and the servants. The family members had rights, responsibilities and privileges that the servants did not.

- Rights:
 - Protection ([Psa 27:10](#))
 - Shelter ([Luk 12:27-28](#))
 - Nourishment ([Luk 12:29-31](#))
 - Unrestricted access ([Eph 2:18](#))
 - Inheritance ([Rom 8:16-17](#), [Gal 3:29](#), [Col 1:12](#))
 - Love ([Isa 49:15](#))
 - Acceptance ([Eph 2:19](#))
 - Instruction ([Joh 14:26](#), [Joh 15:26-27](#) & [Joh 16:1](#))
 - Guidance ([Joh 16:13](#), compare [Rom 8:15](#))
- Responsibilities
 - Obedience ([Deu 14:1](#))
 - Respect ([Lev 19:3](#), [Eph 6:2-3](#))
- Privileges
 - Rewards ([Mat 6:6](#))
 - Gifts ([Mat 7:11](#), [Luk 11:13](#), [Jas 1:17](#))
 - Discipline ([2Sa 7:14-15](#), [Heb 12:5-11](#))

None of the items on this list are necessarily offered to, or available for servants in the household. Even nourishment is not guaranteed for a servant (see [Luk 15:13-16](#)). If they are provided for a servant, it is purely out of the good grace of the master, not because the servant has any claim on him. Sons, however, have every reason to expect these things to be available to them, for that is the nature of sonship. And Scripture confirms to us that God, as our Father, provides these benefits to His sons. Discipline may seem to be an odd choice for a list of privileges, but it is clearly considered to be so in Hebrews 12. Discipline is a mark of sonship as it is evidence of

the Father's love. In fact, lack of discipline is a sign of illegitimacy according to [Heb 12:8](#). And the Father's discipline is not vengeful, punitive or without purpose, but is designed to be corrective, to guide us into holiness and the fruit of righteousness ([Heb 12:10-11](#)).

Through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will

Once again, we note that these benefits of sonship are not based on our merits or any obligation upon God to grant them, but are purely and freely of His grace. This adoption is *through Jesus Christ*. It is the free, unmerited actions of Jesus Christ in reconciling us to the Father through His own blood ([Rom 5:10-11](#), [Col 1:20-22](#)) that provide the basis for these benefits. *All glory to God!* If He did not act to save us, we would all be forever condemned, every last one of us. But thanks be to Him, that He has seen fit to extend His mercy and His love to us.

It is *according to the purpose of His will*, not our own will. In reality, we do not have free will to make these choices while we are unbelievers. We only have the freedom to make *wrong* choices, but are totally and completely unable to make *right* choices. This is not to say that we are unable to choose to do anything good towards our fellow man, for clearly we all do that to some degree, and there are many who choose to live a life of giving to those less fortunate. But we are all completely unable to make any choices or perform any acts, of our own will, that are pleasing to God. *Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6)*, and until we are born again, we do not have the type of faith necessary to please God. Thus, we really do not have free will at all, in spite of what some would like to believe, until we are saved by Him, according to the purpose of His will.

And what is the purpose of His will? This is another phrase Paul repeats in this letter. We find it 3 times in the opening chapter (verses 5, 9 & 11), and then again in [Eph 3:11](#). In fact, it is a phrase he also uses in [Rom 8:28](#), [Rom 9:11](#), [Rom 9:17](#) & [2Ti 1:9](#). This suggests that it is something that we should consider.

Here firstly, it is that God should receive glory for His grace toward us (verse 6). Who could fail to give Him praise and glory when they come to understand the depths of the depravity from which we have been plucked, and the marvelous heights to which He has lifted us? The contrasts between the two states are so profound that it simultaneously humbles us and causes us to be overwhelmed with delight. This can only be a good thing, for it keeps our view of ourselves (and mankind generally) in proper perspective. The paradox of Christianity is that man is so insignificant and evil that he is mere fuel for the fires of hell, but at the same time, so precious that the life of God's own Son was not too large a price to pay. *What is man that You are mindful of him?* David asked (Psa 144:3). What indeed? And yet He chose to save some. *Rev 5:13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"* We will look at further aspects of His purpose as we go on in this letter.

To the praise of his glorious grace

As mentioned above, comprehending His grace can only result in fountains of praise springing forth. Can there be anything more glorious for mere humans to experience? To be weighed down with sin, and the consequent guilt and shame that sin brings as its constant companions; to be alienated from God, and without value or meaning in our existence; to face only the prospect of death and punishment as is our rightful inheritance, and to be liberated from those things, freely and without effort on our

part, can truly be nothing less than glorious. Where then is our ground for boasting ([Rom 3:27](#))? No, it is all to His praise and glory. And it must always be so.

With which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Over and over again, Paul reminds us of our union with Christ. *Faithful in Christ Jesus* (v1), *blessed us in Christ* (v3), *chose us in Him* (v4), *blessed us in the Beloved* (v6), *redemption in Him* (v7), *to unite all things in Him* (v10), *an inheritance in Him* (v11), *sealed in Him* (v13), and so he goes on into chapter 2 and beyond.

Our union with Christ is a desperately important teaching. It is foundational to the whole idea of redemption, justification, reconciliation, sanctification and more. It is the reason why God could, legally and morally, impute our sins to Christ, and impute His righteousness to us. If this doctrine were not true, all the promises of God for us would fail, because God would be acting illegally, and therefore cease to be a just and holy God.

There are two aspects of this union; us in Christ, which is the basis for all the blessings God pours out on us; and Christ in us, which confirms by inner witness our hope of glory ([Col 1:27](#)). Both of these aspects are necessary. As our federal head, Christ has borne the punishment due to us for our sin. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Co 5:21). This leaves us with no more guilt before God, and therefore no more condemnation ([Rom 8:1](#)), and no more punishment due to us ([1Jn 4:15-18](#)). Now when God looks at us, he sees Christ; He sees the Cross and the finished work of His Son, but He no longer looks on our sin. And the presence of Christ, dwelling within us, assures us daily of these facts. We are never separated from the grace of God, but have the deeply implanted confidence and assurance of our salvation planted within us.

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