

From The Father
Ephesians 1:3-6
Pastor John Miller

I'm going to read Ephesians 1:1-2 to set the stage for our text. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus." That is a key phrase in Ephesians 1: "in Christ Jesus." In the greeting, he wishes them, verse 2, "...grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Then, verse 3, Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has..."—past tense—"...blessed us with every spiritual blessing..."—or "all the blessings of the Spirit"—"...in the heavenly places in Christ."

We are headed toward Thanksgiving, and I was thinking that it would be so important for us to learn the blessings that we all possess, as God's people, from God the Father and from God the Son and from God the Holy Spirit.

Some have called this passage "Paul's celebration of blessing." I like that. Paul begins to give us the blessings in verse 4, and they run all the way to verse 14. In the Greek translation, it is actually one long sentence. Paul starts and can't stop. The key to understanding it is in verse 3: "Blessed..."—we get our word "to eulogize" or "to pray" from this word—"...be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us..."—"believers," those who are "in Christ"—"...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

There are three things I want you to notice in verse 3. First, the source of these blessings comes from "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." So we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Everything comes to us from God the Father. He is the source of all our blessings. From Him "there is no variation or shadow of turning." All good things come from God. Secondly in verse 3, the substance of these blessings are all the blessings of the Spirit. The substance is the Spirit. These aren't the material blessings but spiritual blessings. Thirdly, the sphere of these blessings is "in the heavenly places in Christ."

A key to understanding Ephesians 1 and these blessings is that phrase that Paul loved to use: "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" or "in Christ Jesus our Lord." Every Christian is in Christ; you cannot be saved without being in Christ. The moment you are converted, you are taken out of Adam the first, with the sin and condemnation that is there—out of the darkness of Satan's kingdom—and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son and are now in Christ. This is called "positional truth." Positionally you are in Christ Jesus.

All the blessings we are going to cover in this series are given to all Christians. The reason is because all Christians are in Christ. So if you are a Christian, you are in Christ. If you are in Christ, you are saved; you are a child of God. There is no such thing as being saved but not in Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The moment you are saved, born again or regenerated, you are taken out of Adam, with that sin and condemnation, and you are placed in Christ. In

Romans 8:1, it says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The moment you are placed in Christ, you are a child of God, you are blessed and you are not condemned.

So that is a key phrase that appears throughout our text today and throughout this first chapter. Those who are in Christ are blessed from God the Father with spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm in Christ. All these blessings are true for you. You don't need to say, "Well, this is only for the 'deeper-life club.' This is only for the 'super saints.' This is only for Christians who are really into the Word." No; these blessings are for all Christians. This is positional truth.

These blessings not only come from God the Father, verses 4-6, but also from God the Son, verses 7-12, and from God the Holy Spirit, verses 13-14. We see the election of the Father, the sacrifice of the Son and the seal of the Holy Spirit.

Today we will look at the blessings that come to us from God the Father. There are three blessings that come to all of God's people from God the Father. Count the blessings: number one, He has chosen us. Verse 4 says, "...just as He..."—that is, "God the Father"—"...chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." This is called the doctrine of election.

As soon as I mention the doctrine of election, people get nervous and freak out. "Oh, no; what's he going to say?" The doctrine of election is Biblical. It is taught in the Bible that God has chosen us by His grace. It is a doctrine that has confused many and has caused confusion among Christians. The reason is that people look at the sovereign, elective purpose of God as compared with the other doctrine in the Bible that man is free to choose to believe and repent. They can't seem to reconcile the two doctrines. The confusion or the problem is created when we try to reconcile the sovereignty of God with the free will of man. What usually happens is that people then deny that God is sovereign, He doesn't chose, or they deny that man is free and can't pick or reject God.

You say, "Well, yes; that's true. How does that work? I don't know how you can reconcile the two; did God choose me or did I choose Him? Which is it?" The Bible teaches that it is both. You ask, "How can it be both?" I don't know, but isn't it awesome?! How does my phone work? I don't know, but isn't it awesome? How does my car work? I don't know, but I praise God for my car. I'm kind of a simple guy; if I don't understand something, no big deal as long as it works. That's all that matters. The problem comes when we try to reconcile these two things.

I love what John R. W. Stott says: "Scripture nowhere dispels the mystery of election. We should beware of any who should try to systematize it too precisely or rigidly. It's not likely that we shall discover a simple solution to a problem which has baffled the best minds of Christendom for centuries." That's so true. I'm certainly not going to solve the problem, here and now.

But here's my answer to the problem of how you reconcile the two: you don't. But it reconciles

in a higher unity. God knows more than we do. God is wiser than we are. From our perspective this side of eternity, we can't understand how God chooses us, but we also have to repent, believe in Him and choose Him. No doubt they reconcile in the mind of God in a higher unity, and God may one day, when we're in heaven, help us to see and understand it.

I want you to see also that the doctrine of election is taught elsewhere in the Bible. That should be enough authority for us to believe it. If it's taught in God's Word, we should accept it. This doctrine is not an invention of man. It's not John Calvin, Augustin, the saints or the church fathers who came up with this. It's Biblical doctrine. We have it here in Ephesians 1:4 where it says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." It's also in Colossians 3:12 where Paul says, "As the elect of God...put on tender mercies" and other things. In 2 Peter 1:10, it says, "Make your call and election sure." 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul says, "God from the beginning chose you for salvation." So this is just a sampling of many verses in the Bible where it tells us that God chose us or elected us.

The next question we need to ask and seek the answer to is, "What is election?" My definition is "God's sovereign, unconditional act of choosing individuals to be saved." I know a lot of people aren't comfortable with a statement like that. We don't like the sovereignty of God; we don't like it when God's in control. We like to keep control. But I believe that the Bible teaches—I don't understand it and can't fathom it—that God is sovereign, and He unconditionally acts by choosing individuals to be saved.

It's interesting that the word "chose" in Greek is in what's called "the middle voice." The verb is reflective; it signifies that God's choosing was independent of us and our actions and was for Himself, for His own purpose. God chose us by Himself and for Himself and His purposes. So all the blessings we enjoy can be traced back to the sovereign, elective purposes of God.

I like what Harry Allen Ironside said: "This doctrine of election is a family secret that God loves to whisper in the ears of his beloved children." When I had young children of my own in the home, I used to love to get their attention by hugging them, holding them close and whispering in their ear, "Guess what!" They would light up and think I was going to take them to get donuts or take them to Disneyland or someplace really cool. But I would just say, "Daddy loves you." Man, did they light up! It was so cool. So now I get to do it with my grandkids. "Guess what! Papa loves you." They light up and smile, and it's so fun.

So God is actually reaching out to you, putting His arms around you and whispers in your ear. "Guess what! I love you. I've set My love upon you." God, in His foreknowledge, chose us and elected us. What a marvelous truth that is in the Bible. In John 15:16, from the lips of Jesus, He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit."

But God has not chosen any to be lost; the Bible does not teach "double election" or that God chooses some to go to heaven and some to go to hell. You say, "I don't understand that." I don't either, but it's not taught in the Scriptures, so we need to stick to the Bible and preach the

Gospel and share the good news with others.

Man is responsible to believe in Jesus Christ. If you go to heaven, it's all because of God. If you reject Christ and go to hell, it's because you didn't repent and believe in Jesus Christ. You can't blame God for your lost and sinful state. In John 6:37, Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." So there are those who are given to Him, they come to Him, and He won't reject them or cast them out.

How about John 3:16? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." You're not going to believe in Jesus and then hear God say, "Well, I'm sorry; you're not the chosen. You're not the elect." If you turn from your sins today and trust Jesus, who died on the Cross and rose from the dead, He will forgive you of your sins and you will have everlasting life.

When did God elect us? Verse 4 says that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Paul reaches back in His mind before the foundation of the world, before creation, before time began, in eternity past, when only God Himself existed in the perfection of His being. God looked at the future and saw you and chose you.

Don't you love Charles Spurgeon's statement, "It's a good thing God chose me before I was born. If He had waited until after I was born, He never would have chosen me." It's not really true; it's just a humorous thought. But the truth is that God knew you before you were ever born. In eternity past, God set His love upon you and chose you. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul says, "...not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began."

Why did God elect us? Verse 4 says, "...that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Let me give you some reasons why God chose you. Number one, so that you could become holy. He tells us here that "We should be holy and without blame." This is such an important truth. This is what's called "positional righteousness." There is holiness by standing in Christ, imputed to you by faith. Every Christian is as equally holy as any other Christian; no one is more holy than anyone else. Then there is "practical holiness" or sanctification. Every Christian is justified, and every Christian is being—present tense—sanctified. So there is positional holiness or righteousness, and there is practical holiness or righteousness.

We sometimes get the two confused. Everyone who is in Christ is positionally, perfectly, completely holy. God chose you by His grace to make you holy. We can't get any more holy than the righteousness or holiness of Jesus Christ. That is what is imputed to us. That's the doctrine of imputation.

But now the goal in our Christian lives is to bring my practice up to my position. God says, "Be holy as I am holy." So if you are chosen and saved and positionally holy, your goal is to live a life of holiness, and you become more and more like Jesus Christ. That's practical sanctification, and it's progressive. One day when you die or when the Lord takes us home in

the rapture, you'll be perfectly righteous; that's called "glorification."

So salvation has three tenses: past—I've been justified; present—I'm being sanctified; and future—I will be glorified. I'm positionally holy, I'm practically growing in holiness and one day I will actually be perfectly holy. When we get to heaven, we won't have sin anymore. You're never going to lose your patience. You're never going to get angry. You're never going to lust. You're never going to lie. You're never going to have any sin problems anymore. That's why we're looking forward to going to heaven. That will be the final stage of our salvation.

You need to keep all that in mind as you understand these blessings; that He saved us to make us holy. You don't need to confuse the idea by saying, "Well, I'm not that holy. I still stumble and fall." You need to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On earth, Christians will never be sinless, but they should sin less and less and less as they grow in sanctification. So election leads to holiness.

The second reason God chose you is that election leads to love. Verse 4 says, "...before Him in love." So the love of God is "shed abroad in our hearts." We now love God and hate sin. We love others. This is evidence of being saved.

The third reason is that election eliminates boasting. I had to throw that in there. If we are saved by God's grace, and there is no reason in us for God to save us—we didn't merit, deserve or earn it—and it's a free gift of God, we cannot boast. Ephesians 2:8-9, the Bible tells us, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." So this sovereign, elective grace of God eliminates boasting.

Lastly, election brings glory to God. Verse 6 says, "...to the praise of the glory of His grace." Everything that God does in the way that He saves you is all done for His glory. So we are chosen by God the Father.

The second blessing from the Father is in verse 5. Not only has God the Father chosen us, but He has adopted us. What an awesome thought. "...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." This is the purpose of God in electing us: so that He might adopt us.

There is a misunderstood word in verse 5: it's "predestined" or "predestinated" in the King James version. The word "predestination" means "to predetermine." It only refers to saved individuals, and it is God's purpose in what He does with those whom He saves.

One of the things I see so often is that people confuse election with predestination. They're not the same. Election is the act of God choosing us. Predestination is what God chooses to do with us, now that He has chosen us. It's kind of like, "What do I do with them now?" What He does with us is that He adopts us as full sons and daughters into His family. So it's the adoption concept. We're going to see when we get to the blessings from the Son that we have redemption, as well as adoption.

What is adoption? It means “to be placed as adult sons or daughters with full legal standing.” Many of you have been parents, and some of you are parents now raising small children. You know that when children are young, they can’t get an inheritance. They can’t drive a car. They aren’t of legal age yet; they have to grow and mature first. But we are both born into God’s family, called “regeneration,” thus getting the nature of God as children of God, and as adopted sons and daughters, we immediately, instantly receive status as adult sons and daughters, so that we can enjoy our inheritance and our blessings immediately. You don’t have to wait to enjoy the blessings that are yours in Christ; they are yours the moment you are saved, because God has adopted you.

The concept of adoption is not Hebrew in its background; they didn’t have adoption in the Old Testament. If your wife couldn’t produce children, you got another wife or a concubine or you married another woman so you could produce children. But in the Greco-Roman world, there was adoption. A wealthy landowner might not have any children, so he might, in love, pick a slave, free that slave, adopt the slave into the family and then that slave would legally become a son or daughter. All that you owned would go to them as an inheritance.

That’s the picture: We were slaves to sin, God set His love upon us, He chose us, He brought us into His family and placed us there as adult sons and daughters. That’s an awesome thought. I love that.

Remember when you were in elementary school? My favorite time there was recess. Whenever we were doing math, I was praying for recess. When we were doing spelling, I’d pray, “Please Lord, let the bell ring for recess!” I loved recess and hated the classroom. I loved recess because we got to go out to play baseball. We had captains who picked teams. I remember what it was like for the kids who were not picked. You’re just standing there and the captain says, “Okay, we’ll take him. Come on; you’re on the team. Play left field. Don’t play the position. If the ball comes, don’t touch it. Someone else will take care of it.” You felt so rejected. Maybe that was you.

But now that you are God’s child, I want you to realize that the God of all the universe picked you. He chose you. He did so by His love and by His grace and by His mercy. He didn’t pick you because you’re good looking. He didn’t pick you because you’re intelligent or charismatic or wonderful. The Bible says, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world...”—that’s why He picked you; God bless you—“...to confound the wise....God has chosen the weak things... base things...things which are despised and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” God chose you because of His grace and His love and His mercy.

God now has adopted us, given us the status of His full, adult sons and daughters “according to the good pleasure of His will,” verse 5. What a blessing to be a child of the King!

The third blessing that comes to us from the Father is in verse 6. He says that God the Father made us accepted in the Beloved. First we are chosen, then we are adopted and now “to the

praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” In each one of these sections of blessings from the Father, Son and the Spirit, he closes with the same statement: “to the praise of the glory of His grace.”

“He...”—that’s “God the Father”—“...made us accepted in the Beloved.” The word “Beloved” is a reference to Jesus Christ. Next time we will look at the blessings from the Son, beginning in verse 7.

It’s interesting that Paul used that title for Jesus, “the Beloved.” Remember when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist? When Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened and God the Father spoke and said, “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

If I am in Christ, God the Father says the same thing about me. “This is My child...this is My son...this is My daughter in whom My soul delights, in whom I am well pleased.” What a glorious fact that is. So we have been “accepted in the Beloved.” There is nothing we can do in ourselves to make us acceptable to God. There is nothing you can do to deserve, gain, earn or merit favor or acceptance from God.

Now once you become a child of God, don’t confuse salvation with sanctification. You can live a life that pleases God, you can live a life that delights God—God’s love and grace can’t be influenced; He’ll love you no matter what—but you might remove yourself from the blessings of God if you are living in disobedience. You won’t enjoy the sunshine of His love if you are walking in disobedience. So if you become a child of God, you want to walk in holiness and love. And you need to understand that He has accepted you not because of who you are but because of what Christ did for you on the Cross.

The New Testament book of Philemon is one chapter. It’s a little postcard epistle. It’s written by Paul to a man in Colossae named Philemon. The reason he wrote it is because Philemon had a slave by the name of Onesimus. Onesimus ran away from Philemon; he became a fugitive. He went to Rome where Paul was in prison under house arrest. He met Paul there. You talk about the providence of God! Talk about God choosing you! You’re a slave, you run away, you go to get lost in the big city of Rome, but you hear Paul the Apostle speaking and you become a Christian! He had to tell Paul that he was a slave, a fugitive, who ran away from his master in Colossae, but he had to go back. So Paul asked him, “Who is your master there? I know a lot of people in Colossae, because I ministered there.”

“His name is Philemon.”

Paul said, “I know Philemon!” Isn’t that awesome? So Paul said, “I’m going to write a letter for you and with you, and you’re going to carry it back to him. I’m going to tell Philemon that when you get back, ‘If then you count me as a partner, receive him [Onesimus] as you would me.’” Catch that phrase “receive him as you would me.” Do you know how God receives you? As Jesus Christ.

Then Paul says the second thing in Philemon 18: “If he has wronged you or owes anything, put

that on my account." I like that. Paul says, "Accept him like you would me. Put what he owes to my account." And in verse 19, Paul says, "I will repay."

Jesus paid the price.

"Jesus paid it all.

All to Him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain;

He washed it white as snow."

God accepts us as He does His own Son.

So we are chosen in Christ, we are adopted in Christ and we are accepted in Christ. No wonder in verse 6 that Paul says, "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

Amen.