

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Predestined to Adoption

Ephesians 1:5-6

Intro: As we return to our study of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, it's important that we do a quick review of what Paul has said so far. After his initial greeting in v1-2, Paul encourages the believer in v3 by revealing that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing...in Christ. Paul will then spend the next 11 verses explaining what these spiritual blessings actually consist of and he will do it in an orderly way. In short, these blessings in heavenly places are nothing less than the work of the Trinity on behalf of and in the life of the believer. The work of God the Father is on display in v4-6; the work of Jesus Christ is highlighted in v7-10 and the work of the Holy Spirit is revealed in v11-14. This order is not accidental or contrived. Paul is saying that the spiritual blessings listed here come to us from God the Father but that they only become ours in Jesus Christ and they are applied to our lives and Christian experience by the Holy Spirit.

In our last study, we began looking at the blessings that come from the Father; there are 3 of them listed in 4-6: election (4), predestination (5) and acceptance (6). Of course, we spent almost the entire time discussing the first of these blessings (election) because all the other blessings result from God's own sovereign act of choosing us. It is important that we have at least a working knowledge of God's sovereignty in our salvation but not everyone will be in total agreement with the scenario as it was laid out and that's ok, this doctrine is not meant to be a make-or-break doctrine but rather a truth that brings both comfort and assurance to the believer's heart. Just knowing that God has chosen you before the foundation of the world and has arranged world history just so you could be exposed to the gospel and provide you with the faith to believe it and the grace to accept it is a comforting thought.

But, full disclosure, while we focused the majority of our attention on God's sovereign choice in our salvation, v3 doesn't actually mention salvation. What does it really say? It says that God chose us in Him, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Clearly, this could not happen for anyone apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God's election unto salvation is obviously

implied in the text if not explicitly stated.

Still, we are remiss if we downplay or ignore what the text actually says – that not only did God choose us for salvation before the foundation of the world but He also chose us to be holy and blameless before Him in love. This verse alone puts the lie to the heretical idea that once a person is saved, they can live however they want to because they can never lose their salvation. The problem with that idea is that it runs contrary to everything the Bible teaches about salvation, true repentance and the effective Christian life. This is not the only passage in Scripture that debunks this grave error, it just so happens to be the one we're dealing with today.

This false concept is not a new heresy; it has been a problem from the beginning! I mentioned the Exodus before and it's in Israel's escape from Egypt where this problem is most evident. The Exodus consisted of 2 separate parts and escaping from Egypt was just the first half. It's easy for us to forget this in an age where freedom is understood as merely being freedom from something: tyranny, oppression, constraint or whatever. This aspect of liberation, as wonderful as it is, is only half the deal. In the Bible, more emphasis is always placed on the freedom for something: worship, flourishing, growth in obedience and joy and glory. Humans are not designed to be free from all constraint, slaves to nothing but our own desires. Everybody serves somebody. The point of the Exodus was not just for Israel to find deliverance from serving the old master. It was for them to find delight in serving the new Master – Jehovah!

This was God's intention for the Exodus all along. At the burning bush encounter, God describes Moses' mission like this, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain" ([Ex 3:12b](#)). Basically, God was telling Moses, "You are currently servants to Pharaoh but when you are done, you will be servants to Me." As it turns out, freedom from serving Pharaoh was the easy part. From beginning to end, it only takes 14 chapters. Freedom to serve God, on the other hand, takes 40 years of wandering and the next 4 books. And even after all that, they still didn't quite have it right ([Judges](#) – [II Kings](#)).

The 2 halves of the Exodus – freedom from serving Pharaoh and freedom to serve God – are summarized beautifully in the 1st commandment: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of

bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex 20:2-3). The shape and nature of this service to the Lord is then filled out and explained across the next 9 commandments and to this day, those 10 rules summarize the shape of a life lived in liberated obedience.

Oddly enough, when the 10 commandments are finished, to our surprise, the very next law concerns something that appears to be very obscure: what happens when a slave loves his master and wants to continue serving him even after he is entitled to leave (Ex 21:1-6). Was this a bit of serendipity; a whimsical accident on Moses’ part? Not likely! A little reflection shows that even this reinforces the wider point about true freedom. When slaves, like Israel, love their masters, they will choose lifelong service over walking away.

We were chosen by the Father to be holy and without blame; chosen for holiness. Any understanding of God’s sovereign choosing that diminishes our personal responsibility for personal holiness and sanctification falls far short of the whole counsel of God and is completely outside of His stated intentions for our salvation and His divine will. It’s also not by accident that the term holy and without blame are closely related to the only acceptable sacrifices prescribed under the old covenant – without spot or blemish. Within the constraints of the new covenant, written and signed in the blood of Jesus, we’re to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which, in the end, is merely our reasonable service (Rm 12:1) – nothing special, no great accomplishment, just what we’re saved to be.

5 – Here we meet that often misunderstood and much maligned word: predestined. People often conflate or confuse predestination with election, as if they are one and the same but, while they may seem to be closely related, they are actually 2 distinct acts of God. In the Bible, predestination is used primarily to refer to what God does for saved people. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that people are predestined to hell because the word refers only to God’s people. This would in fact, be redundant as Jesus said in Jn 3:18 that the unbeliever was condemned already. The word simply means to ordain beforehand, to predetermine. The distinction between the 2 words is seen most clearly in Jn 15:16 (chose – election; appointed - ordained, predestination). Election seems to refer to people while predestination seems to refer to purposes.

The meaning of predestination is important but the things that are

predetermined are exciting. In his speech to the Sanhedrin, Peter indicated that the events connected with crucifixion of Jesus were predetermined ([Acts 4:25-28](#)) and thank God they were! In [John 15:16](#), Jesus said His disciples were predestined to go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. In [Rom 8:29](#), Paul tells us that we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ! Again, these are not things we are expected to conjure up and work out through our own efforts and in our own strength. These are blessings that God has ordained beforehand to accomplish in our lives! These are the things that are being brought to pass in our lives through working of the Holy Spirit. Its divine power fulfilling divine purposes!

Now, in our text, the 2nd spiritual blessing that comes to us through the work of the Father is the fact that He has predestined us to adoption! This is the Father's destiny for His chosen, that they would enjoy adoption as sons. God's unfolding plan for us not only includes salvation and personal transformation, but also a warm, confident relationship with the Father. This relationship is explained further in [Rom 8:15](#). Instead of a spirit of bondage to fear, we've received the Spirit of adoption – the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit that allows and enables us to bring our needs, concerns and fears to the Father without any trepidation or hesitation.

If you read [Rom 8](#) in its entirety, you'll notice that adoption has 2 phases; both for the present and the future. Now, we know the no one gets into God's family by adoption. You only get into God's family by regeneration, new birth – being born again. So why is adoption important? Adoption is the act of God by which He gives His “born ones” an adult standing in the family. Under Roman law, adoption was comprehensive and complete. The adopted person immediately had all the rights of a legitimate descendent in their new family and completely lost all rights in their old family. In the eyes of the law they were a new person. They were so new that even all debts and obligations connected with their previous family were abolished as if they had never existed.

God adopts us into His family so that we might immediately begin to claim our inheritance in Him and enjoy our spiritual wealth (blessings). An infant cannot legally access or use their inheritance but an adult son or daughter can and should! This means you don't have to wait until you're an old saint before you can begin to claim your riches in Christ! Your old sin debt's been cancelled. You've been granted access to the Father's riches in Christ

Jesus! You're a real, live, walking, talking trust-fund baby!

Not to over state it but this is a high position in the family of God. This gives us something in Jesus that Adam never had! When skeptics offer up the speculative question as to why God went ahead with creation when He knew that it would be followed by the failure and fall of man, one answer that we can tentatively give them is that God destined us for a higher position and dignity than even creation could bestow upon us. That's saying a whole lot because man is already the pinnacle of God's creation and yet, God, through adoption has predetermined to raise us even higher.

And God's not finished raising us up! The future aspect of adoption is seen in [Rom 8:23](#) and relates to the glorified body we will receive when Jesus returns. We already have our adult standing before God but the world cannot see it.

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth in glory, we will return with him in our glorified bodies and this "private adoption" will be made public for everyone to see!

Why has God done this? What was the determining factor behind all of this work of choosing, predetermining and adopting? It was nothing more than the good pleasure of His will. Our God is a God that loves to give good gifts. He did all of this because He wanted to and also because of something else...

6 – to the praise of the glory of His grace – in our election, in our predestination to be conformed to the image of Christ and to bear fruit; in our adoption into God's family – all of these things compel us to praise the glory of God's wonderful, matchless grace. It was by His grace He chose us, saved us, ordained us and adopted us into His family. It is His grace that pardons us from sin and it will be His grace that leads us home. We don't possess the necessary vocabulary to explain, let alone accurately praise the goodness of God's grace and yet, we cannot help but work with what we have. Though our feeble efforts do not do God's grace its proper justice, He is still pleased with our trying.

As wonderful and amazing as God's grace is, Paul actually says it has accomplished something else in the life of the believer – it has made us accepted in the Beloved. Accepted is the 3rd blessing that the Father has

bestowed upon us but what does it mean? The Greek word is *charito* – highly favored or full of grace and this blessed status is bestowed on every believer through and because of God's grace. Clearly, we cannot make ourselves acceptable no more than you can clean a dirty floor with a dirty mop and dirty water – you only spread the filth around. But God, in His grace, makes us accepted in Christ Jesus. This is our eternal status and position and it will never change!

But, how does this happen, how can it? Remember, Jesus was completely accepted by the Father. All His character, all of His words and works were acceptable to God the Father as was evidenced by His ascension back into heaven after His resurrection. Now, when a lost, depraved sinner invites Jesus Christ into their life to be both their Lord and Savior, they become acceptable to the Father in the Beloved (Jesus). God's grace is extended to His people and enfolds them; the Father has be-graced those who are in Christ. Paul used this same argument when he wrote to Philemon to encourage him to accept his runaway slave, Onesimus. He said, in effect, "If he owes you anything, I will repay it. Receive him as you would receive me" ([Phil 1:17-19](#) paraphrased).

Paul realizes that this ridiculous arrangement cannot help but give glory to God's grace. Just as in the OT, through the giving of the Law, God's justice and holiness were glorified; so too, by the giving of the Gospel, God's grace and mercy were made equally glorious. Sadly, God's plan in the gospel is often rejected exactly because it glorifies God and His grace and not the effort and achievement of man.

What an amazing series of blessings that have been bestowed upon us by the Father. Like the Hebrew children of old, we were slaves. We were slaves to sin, death, fear, the flesh and the devil. But at just the right time, God rescued us. He defeated our enemy and redeemed us through the blood of His Son, taking us through the waters of baptism, uniting us to Himself, giving us His spirit to lead us and guide us and providing us with all we need. He did all this, not so that we could do our own thing but so that we could do His thing. And He is taking us on toward a new creation of resurrection and victory – to a land truly flowing with milk and honey.

All of this to the praise of His glory!

We have been saved out of the good pleasure of His will to fulfill the good purposes of His will. What does that look like in your life? 😊