

January 19, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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CHOSEN IN CHRIST Ephesians 1:3-6

Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He wrote what God led him to write. But even under inspiration, God the Holy Spirit used the personalities of the writers. Knowing that, we conclude that Paul was not an English major while he attended Gamaliel's school. Beginning with 1:3 and ending at 1:14, we have one very long run-on sentence. I can picture Paul just linking together crucial thought after crucial thought maybe feeling like he just couldn't stop piling up God's blessings. In this one sentence, we have critical statements about the past (vv.4-6), present (vv.5-8), and future (vv.9-10) of God's amazing plan of redemption.

In fact, this long sentence begins with praise to God for His astonishing work (v.3). It is possible that the verses that follow until verse fourteen comprise a prayer in which Paul extols God the Father who elects (vv.3-6), God the Son who redeems (vv.7-10), and God the Holy Spirit who seals (vv.11-14) in the plan of redemption.

The great truth we need to take from the opening verses is that God has graciously worked to place His chosen people in Christ. That sounds terribly theological, but it is actually very practical, very relevant for life. How so?

Who are you? You might identify yourself by your family heritage, or your geographical origin, or your current job, or any number of identifiers. Children are identified by their parents, wives might find identity in their husbands, husbands find their identity in their work, artists find identity in their art, musicians in music and so on. And Christians generally find their identity in their church. While all of these are noble conclusions, they are not correct for the child of God.

The self-help gurus, even supposedly Christian self-help gurus, foster this heresy among God's people. They peddle a "religious" form of humanism by sprinkling Bible verses on their errant doctrine like a child sprinkling decorations on the cupcakes she just made. Because the error of humanism teaches that "man is the measure of all things," the counselors' recommendations and advice focus on what a person needs to do in order to feel self-worth. These recommendations for encouraging self, protecting self, esteeming self, finding satisfaction in self, and living for self are endless. And all those efforts actually make matters worse. Instead of achieving satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment, the needy person actually ends up deeper in the pit, still experiencing anxiety, continuing to have depression and discouragement on a worse level than when he or she began the process.

Our text unfolds the reason for this failure. Granted, the typical sinner of the world really does not have any other hope or means for help. They are destined to be victims of the sin principle. But real Christians are highly privileged. We are God's children by divine fiat. Through Jesus Christ, God our Creator has taken us out of sin's bondage, placed us in Christ, and seated us in heavenly places with Him. God did this because He loves us. He loves us in particular because He wants to.

Therefore, our identity is not in who or what we want to be, where we came from, what we have experienced in life, or what we do. Our identity is in Christ. That is why we are confident in Christ. We understand that we are who we are because of Christ. We rest confidently in the face of difficult circumstances because God our Creator has placed us in the Beloved Son. He is the reason for who and what we are. And once we grasp the importance of this truth, our hearts will overflow with praise to God just like Paul's heart overflows in this text.

God. (v.3)

There is no better topic or person by which to begin a study. Here we are reminded that God deserves all blessing. Paul declared, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (v.3a)*. What does "bless Him" mean? Actually, it seems more accurate to conclude

that Paul began the body of this letter, specifically the doctrinal thesis, with an outburst. As if to say, “Listen, this is what God deserves!”

The term “blessed” sounds like a command, something we should do, a way we should respond to God. It is true that we ought to praise God. But this word is not a verb telling us what we should do. “Blessed” is an adjective describing God’s character. When the true believer begins to contemplate God, we should quickly be overwhelmed by His person and character and agree with Paul, that God is worthy of all praise, all honor, all glory. In fact, God is worthy of praise beyond our ability to imagine or express it.

This outburst of praise from Paul is neither formal nor superficial. It is not the kind of thing boring religious folks do on Sunday morning as they recite creeds and mantras with no emotion. It is as though the apostle’s heart, what he truly is on the inside, erupted and spewed out his true opinion of God. Such praise ought to especially be found in our prayers and singing and all around worship – private and corporate.

God is worthy of praise, honor, and blessing because of who He is. He is *the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. On one hand, that is a precise, factual, historical statement. God the Father is the Father in the triune Godhead. God the Father is the head of Jesus Christ. Paul also addressed that very difficult concept when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3)*.

That God the Father is superior to God the Son and yet the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal baffles our finite wisdom. It is an expression of function. God the Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Holy Spirit, and yet the Son asked the Father to send the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Trinity has particular ministries and yet those ministries and functions intertwine and overlap.

This conundrum reminds us that we know God comparatively little. He has been so gracious to reveal so much about Himself in creation (Romans 1:20). He has been so gracious to reveal more about Himself in the Bible than we can comprehend. He has been so gracious to give us the exact imprint of Himself in Christ the Son (Hebrews 1:3). Yet we struggle to know Him. We need to

acknowledge this challenge. It is so important for us to know God, because He made us in His image. Therefore, to know God is to know ourselves. The better we know God, the better we know ourselves. For that reason, many professing Christians really don’t know who or what they are (identity crisis) because they really don’t know who God is.

To know God is to begin to learn how much He has blessed us. Our God is *He who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (v.3b)*. Try to grasp that truth that God has blessed us in Christ. Again, the simple statement that God has blessed us in Christ betrays the phenomenal riches of that blessing. Without Christ, we would know nothing of the blessings of God.

In the first fourteen verses of this chapter, Christ is mentioned by name, title, or pronoun fifteen times. The formula “In Christ” or “In Him” occurs eleven times. The important truth rooted in those words is that ONLY in Christ does the Father pour out these blessings. Again, this letter was written to the Church, to true believers. This study is for Christians, not the unsaved.

But is it possible that unsaved people could read this letter, or even that some people in our congregation who study with us through the letter are unsaved? Yes. And the benefit to them is that faith comes through hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). However, the fact remains that all these spiritual blessings that flow from God’s hand are reserved only for His people. God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has poured out incomprehensible blessings on US through Him. That truth should make us stop to wonder who we are that God the Creator would condescend to us at all, much less bless us immensely. The answer to that wondering is given in verses four and five.

Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. We know from experience how greatly God graces us with material blessings. First, there are the blessings of common grace that all creatures enjoy, everything from sunshine to see, water to drink, air to breath. But far in excess of all that, God heaps on us all kinds of passing things and experiences that bring joy to our lives.

For the Christian, however, the blessings of God are compounded exponentially. Some of those blessings God gives us through Christ are listed in this chapter. For example, God has poured

out on us the spiritual blessings of election (v.4), adoption (v.5), redemption (v.7), forgiveness (v.7), revelation of God's plan (v.9), inheritance (v.11), hope (v.12), the word of truth (v.13), Holy Spirit sealing (v.14). How could people who have received such blessings not be satisfied? Doesn't it seem ludicrous to ignore these spiritual blessings while we chase after passing, ever-changing things and relationships that never satisfy?

Keep reading. God has blessed us through Christ *in the heavenly places*. Where or what are the heavenly places? That is a fair and good question. Because the phrase shows up five times in this letter, we should get a pretty clear understanding of the answer. In 1:20, we discover that the heavenly places is where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father. According to 2:6, it is where Christ Jesus is reigning supreme. But almost in contrast, it would seem that the heavenly places is where spiritual rulers and authorities exist (3:10). And even worse according to 6:12, the heavenly places is where our spiritual enemies exist and function.

Therefore, we must conclude that the heavenly places, the realm where God pours out His blessings on His people, is the supernatural spirit world. That makes sense when we realize that spiritual blessings are things like election, adoption, forgiveness, redemption, and so forth. Those blessings do not take place in the passing, physical realm of life. These blessings show evidence or manifest themselves in the physical life, but they are given in the spiritual realm. It is much like Jesus' explanation of these very blessings to Nicodemus. He said, "*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit*" (John 3:8). In the spiritual part of us, we manifest mostly the "divine image." In the spiritual realm we know God, love God, experience and appreciate His blessings. Not surprisingly then, it is in our spiritual realm that we fight the unrelenting battles between yielding to self or yielding to God.

God's Work. (vv.4-6)

Part of God's blessings to us through Christ Jesus is that He chose us. Notice that God chose us in eternity. *Even as he chose us*

in him before the foundation of the world (v.4a). The astonishing truth here is the simple statement that God chose us. How can we possibly explain any better an idea that is so simplistic. There is no need for us to dig deeply into the Greek syntax or to create a theological system to explain this simple blessing.

Here is the point: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is existing for eternity, which means that there was never a point where He did not exist. In that timeless state of eternity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit create the plan of salvation. In that plan, God chose to create the universe and create man in His image. And according to God's will, He chose to save some of those humans to eternal life. God also chose to allow all of the humans to fall into sin. But, God chose to save the elect through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. God chose to sanctify and glorify those He elected to salvation.

The point is that the Creator made the choices He alone is justified to make.

He chose us in Christ (v.4b). In this statement, the cross of Christ becomes central. God the Son being crucified on a cross by wicked humans was not a mistake, an accident, or an oversight. It was God's choice. Therefore, that Christ was crucified is our purpose for living. So when you get to the point that you wonder, "Why try anymore?" or "Why discipline myself?" "Or what is the use when I am plagued by this stubborn darkness of depression?" The answer is always the same. "Because Christ was crucified, buried, and risen again so that I might receive the blessings of God through Him."

Jesus Christ and Him crucified was the message above all messages Paul determined to give to Christians in Corinth. He confessed, *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)*. How can the Christian's identity be in anything other than Christ?

God chose us before He created anything. Therefore, His choice to save His child could not have been based on any merit or future merit of the sinner. Before God created the first speck of light, He already chose to place us into the eternal relationship with Christ. God's amazing plan of salvation of unworthy sinners through the

sacrifice of the Beloved Son was what God determined to be just and, therefore, what He determined to do.

In choosing us to receive forgiveness from sin and all the other spiritual blessings, God chose *that we should be holy (v.4c)*. Holy is God's character. He is completely separate from sin. That part of God's image was destroyed in us when sin came into the world. Now the adjective "holy" describes God's intent for us. On one hand, those who are chosen are clothed in Christ's righteousness at salvation which makes us holy. Salvation separates us from sin and sinners and unto God through Christ for eternity. On the other hand, it is our responsibility to live according to what we are – though we often fall short.

Furthermore, God chose us to be *blameless before him (v.4d)*. Even though we struggle with sin and often fail, in God's plan He has chosen us to be blameless. Christ the Son has already taken all our blame upon Himself on the cross. Because the Father chose us blameworthy people to receive blessings through Christ, our blame was shifted to Christ. The result is the incredible promise of God that is made certain through Christ. God's promise is: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)*. It is absolutely certain because it came through Christ. *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:20-22)*.

God not only chose us, but He also predestined us. *In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (vv.4b-5)*. God's motivation for predestining us was love (v.4b). His choice in eternity was motivated by love for His elect. But there is nothing loveable in a sinner like me. The good news is that God's love is not cheap, shallow, and demanding like our's is. God's love is (*agapei*) and is not an emotion. God's love for those He has chosen is a decision to do what is best for us even though it required great sacrifice. God chose to make the decision to do good to us.

The good God chose to do was to predestine us for adoption through Jesus Christ. The idea is that God set the boundaries for me

in eternity. Predestination is God's eternal decree which is unaffected by any part of creation. Therefore, "having set the boundaries before hand" is a good definition of the word.

In this case, the boundary enclosed God's children in the family of God by adoption through Jesus Christ. Spiritual adoption, like human adoption, is the choice and act of God by which He puts us in His family. Adoption is already complete in the born again child of God. We already have the rights of God's child, share the inheritance with Christ the Son, and have the right to refer to God as "Father" or even better "Abba" (Daddy). We will experience the full benefit of adoption when we are glorified in the presence of Christ.

Notice also that God *predestined us according to the purpose of His will (v.5)*. We did not choose to be adopted by God. We have known people in the past who visited orphanages, discovered a child who they chose to love, and then went through the process of adoption. An orphan might plead and say, "Pick me, pick me." But an orphan does not have the option of going to the lawyer and filling out the forms to become the child of the parents he or she chooses. It is the parent's choice.

As in all things that have to do with salvation, adoption is according to His purposes, according to what He has already chosen. How do we respond to this amazing truth? Believe it or not, some people who claim to be children of God, adopted into His family, actually hate this wonderful truth. They claim that it is impossible because they think they became God's child by their own choice. That is pride and indicates that the person is not born again at all.

Far better for us to fall on our faces in humility before God and praise Him for His incomprehensible love for and choice of us. We do well to follow the example of Paul and praise God's grace. *To the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (v.6)*. Praise God's grace. God's unmerited favor to us is glorious. Praise Him for it. By grace God has blessed us in the Beloved.

What can we say? How can we respond? We really do not have the words or thoughts to express the praise that such love deserves.