
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

We Are More Than “Okay” (Part 1b)

Our Standing With God Because of the Father

Ephesians 1:3-6

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 would be holy and blameless before Him. In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

How many of you know what is a matryoshka (ma-truo-ska)? A matryoshka might be better known to most of us as a Russian nesting doll; a set of wooden dolls of decreasing size, one placed one inside the other. Why do I begin by telling you about Russian nesting dolls? I start this way because in many ways Ephesians 1:3-14, is like a matryoshka. In verse 3 we have the main, large doll where we are told that the blessed God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. It is as if Paul were handing us the ornate, beautifully crafted matryoshka, only we did not know that there was more to this gift. And so, beginning in verse 4, and running all the way through verse 14, Paul begins to unpack just what these blessings are; one after another.

And just what is the nature of these spiritual blessings that belong to everyone who is “in Christ”? I would point out to you that these blessings are “salvific” in nature; that is, they all relate to aspects of our salvation. We tend to be fairly monotone, one-dimensional in our language about salvation. We will tell people we are “saved;” sometimes we might say that we are “born-again;” or we might branch out and say that we are “redeemed;” but we are rarely accused of being verbose in our telling others what it means to be saved. Not for Paul. Here he is dynamic, multi-faceted, thrusting at us one blessing after the other concerning our salvation. Like taking a starving man to a buffet, this spiritual food cannot be delivered fast enough. Going back to our matryoshka illustration, like given such a doll set to a child who does not know exactly what is placed before her, Paul is going to reveal that there is more to the gift of “every spiritual blessing” than meets the eye. From the initial statement that believers are “*blessed...with every spiritual blessing,*” we learn that...

1. We are blessed with being chosen by God who is the Chooser. (4)
2. We are blessed with holiness and blamelessness in love (before God) in Christ. (4)
3. We are blessed with adoption through Christ, having been predestined as such by His will. (5)
4. We are blessed with God's glorious grace, which He blessed us with in the Beloved. (6-7)
5. We are blessed with redemption through Christ's blood (7)
6. We are blessed with the forgiveness of our trespasses. (7)
7. We are blessed with the knowledge of the mystery of His will to unite all things in Christ (9-10)
8. We are blessed with that unity and therefore inclusion in Christ. (vs 10)
9. We are blessed with an inheritance in Christ, of which we will one day take possession. (11)
10. We are blessed with the seal of the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance. (13-14)

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Let me make one more comment about this broader text of verses 3-14 before we begin. It is clear that Paul is speaking to his readers concerning the greatness of salvation in Christ and of the amazingness of grace in these verses. And from these verses we learn that if any one of these elements or actions of God are missing, then we simply are not saved. As we noted last week, the blessing of salvation begins with God's divine election, in choosing by Himself; for Himself and to Himself those whom He would make holy and blameless and proceeds on to the other blessings of salvation as found "in Christ" and Christ alone.

So then, Ephesians 1:3-14 is divided into three sections, in verses 3-6 we seek the work of the Father; in verses 7-12 we see the work of the Son; and in verses 13-14 we see the work of the Spirit in connection with our salvation. And what is the purpose or goal of unpacking this truth that in Christ we are more than okay, but rather we are most blessed of all people? The begging of verse three reminds us that our God is blessed; a God to be praised for who He is and what He has done. And then we have constant reminders throughout the text that as we consider our salvation, we must point the praise to the glory and grace of God. For in verses 6, 12, and 14, in reference to the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we are told that all of these blessings are to the praise of His glory and grace!

Now, we have seeing the main matryoshka (ma-truo-ska); that of every spiritual blessing in Christ; and have opened it to see the first of these blessings, divine election in verse 4. Looking now to verses 5-6, we see two more blessings, that of adoption as sons by the predetermined will of God (what we will call, divine predestination) and the blessing of grace, which has been given to us in the person of Christ (what we will call divine grace). Just to keep things clear, there are three blessings that come to us by the work of the Father that make us more than just okay with Him. We have divine election; divine predestination and divine grace. Let us look at the second of these blessing now, divine predestination.

II. Divine Predestination (1:5)

In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

In verse 5 the Apostle continues to unpack the blessings of salvation that ought to cause us to bless, praise, honor, extol and adore our heavenly Father. Here the reason given is the great, gracious, eternal work of the Father, motivated by love, called "predestination." — *In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will..,*

I find it amazing that some many people shut down, tune out, or get turned off by the word or idea of predestination; particularly because it is a biblical word. There is no way around this truth, in fact, it is a truth given here that is to cause rejoicing among the saints; that truth is of God's glorious, sovereign predestination. Like the doctrine or teaching of election in verse 4, this truth is so plainly revealed in Scripture that it simply cannot be denied by anyone who is honest with the text. It is right before us and I cannot imagine why anyone would want to deny such a blessing.

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A. Predestined us...

What does it mean that God “*predestined us*”? The verb “predestined” in our text is *proorizo* (προορίζω) in the Greek. It is made up of the prefix, “pro” – meaning before; or beforehand; and “horizo” – meaning to mark or bound. We get the word “horizon” the mark or boundary of the earth and “In Greek, the word *proorizo* means to mark out or determine something beforehand. So, the teaching of predestination is the all-inclusive pre-determined purpose of God in which He sovereignly ordained all things that come to pass, all according to His own timing. Paul gives to us this all-inclusive idea of predestination in verse 11 where we read that we have “*been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will...*” Let me be clear; all things that have been, are now, and forevermore will be were purposed by God, in eternity, and are brought to pass by God, in time, to accomplish all His purposes; the great purpose before us is His own glory revealed in the salvation of great multitude whose names were inscribed in the Lamb’s book of life, put there before the foundation of the world by God’s own sovereign choice. Beloved, this is the Bible doctrine of divine predestination. It is not made up. It is not a slight of hand trick thought up by Calvin and the Reformers. We see it in the very language of Holy Scripture. — “*In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*”

B. To Adoption as Sons...

And just to what are we who are in Christ predestined, marked out beforehand to become? We are determined by God to receive “adoption as sons”. Notice that the very language implies God’s choice as noted in verse 4. God has determined some to become His sons and daughters. Why some and not all? All Paul tells us is that it is “*according to the kind intention of His will.*” It was not something found in those adopted, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23); all are dead in their trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1); all are alienated, hostile in mind and engaged in evil deeds before Christ (Colossians 1:21). The reason is God’s kindness; God’s undeserved mercy and grace. The apostle John, when considering this very truth of adoption as sons, cries out in 1 John 3:1, “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are...*” The motivation that God would make us His children is not found in the children; it is found in God’s love. And what do we find in our Ephesians text? “*In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons...*”

Let us consider this matter of adoption, shall we? The idea of adoption, that act of legally making a non-family member an actual family member, with all the rights and privileges that come as being a part of that family, was a very rare practice in ancient Israel. However, it was much more common among the first century Gentiles of the Greco-Roman world. Through the process of adoption, the once non-family member is legally brought into the family to assume all of the rights and responsibilities of his or her new family. This is the idea that Paul is drawing from.

As much as we in the church might talk about this process of adoption, you might find it interesting that it is only Paul who uses this term, but oh, how he uses it. The biblical doctrine of adoption is found in (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and here in Ephesians 1:5). In Romans 8:15-17, Paul speaks of the present reality of the believers’ adoption saying: *15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,*

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17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. Both here and in Galatians 4:5-7, we see that being adopted by God moves us from the status of being slaves, to that of being sons and heirs. In other words, in adoption, we currently enjoy all of the privileges of being members of God's family. There is a future aspect of the believer's adoption as well. In Romans 8:23 we read, *23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* The point is that we both enjoy a new and present standing as sons of God, part of His family, granted the privilege of calling Him "Father" and "Daddy" – while at the same time, recognizing that this adoption, while as good as done, will not be finalized until we get our new resurrection bodies at the return of Christ.

C. Through Jesus Christ...

So what? What is the big deal about being adopted as sons, with all the rights, responsibilities and privileges that come with such a standing, and all by the predetermined purpose and kindness of God? Beloved, how can anyone who is in Christ, who has so believed upon the work of the Father, Son and Spirit in his or her salvation, have anything but solid assurance of salvation by such a truth as this. For if we are saved because of any goodness or merit that stems from our corrupt hearts, then we will continually be on shaky ground because we never know if we, in ourselves, have enough of whatever is necessary to qualify us for salvation. In fact, the Bible teaches us that in ourselves we do not have enough (Romans 3:23). However, if our salvation comes from God's own choice and purpose, which He pre-determined before the foundation of the world was laid, then we have a sure standing with God. And, if you ask, "How can I know whether God has chosen me; that I am one of God's elect?" hear the words of John Calvin (*Sermons on Ephesians* [Banner of Truth], p. 47) who said: *"How do we know that God has elected us before the creation of the world? By believing in Jesus Christ."*

In other words, here is the gospel, beloved. We are once again reminded that all that we have from God is found in Christ and has come to us because Christ willingly went to the cross to secure our salvation. Let me lavish this upon you again. Every spiritual blessing we receive comes to us in Christ (1:3). We are chosen in Christ (1:4); we are predestined to adoption as sons through Christ (1:5); grace is lavishly bestowed upon us in Christ, who is the Beloved (1:6); we are redeemed in Christ and forgiven in Christ (1:7); even our future inheritance is in Christ (10-11). And why is all this and more so? What is the purpose that we are to seize upon as we consider all this? Every spiritual blessing is ours in Christ so that in Christ and through Christ alone; not in us or through us at all, God receives all the glory! In adoption, God chooses to make us His own and has legally accomplished it through the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ.

D. To Himself...

Coming back to verse 5 again, we find even more; not only are we adopted as sons; not only is this adoption through Jesus Christ rather than through; but this pre-determined adoption is *"to Himself."* What weighty and precious words are these; *"to Himself."* What does this mean? Beloved, we are not adopted merely to joy (which we are to be), not merely to blessings in time (which we are), or to blessings in eternity (which we will be), and not even merely to all the creation of God, with all that this creation can supply, but rather we are adopted *"to Himself."*

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What wondrous grace is this that our God and heavenly Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has predetermined to bring us to Himself, not as slaves, not as prisoners, not as subjects, but as children to enjoy Him! Do you enjoy the God who saves you?

The point is this; not only does God bestow upon His chosen all the wealth of His spiritual blessings in Christ; but He also brings us into an intimate relationship with Him, whereby we now know Him as *"Abba! Father!"* Abba was a Hebrew term of endearment meaning, "Daddy," or "Papa." To be sure, I rarely address God as "Daddy" for I feel it to be a bit too irreverent, I nonetheless know that I can draw near to Him and will be received joyfully by Him as one of His beloved children! The doctrine of adoption emphasizes this new relationship with our heavenly Father.

E. According to the kind intention of His will...

As if every word used has not already made this clear; Paul makes absolutely sure that everything that has been said is understood as being solely the result of God. We read that all of this is all *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* The KJV says it this way, *"according to the good pleasure of his will..."* If there is one thing that this letter to the Ephesians makes clear, it is that salvation, from start to finish, is a God thing. Yes, we believe; we must believe; we must have faith; but even this is from God. Remember Ephesians 2:8-9? It says, *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* What this verse tells us is that our salvation, including the grace of God as well as the faith we must have, *if "the gift of God; not as a result of works..."* This is all God's doing, according to, in line with His kindness and grace. Putting verses 3-5 together with this understanding, we are to understand...

- We were not blessed according to our will, but *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* (v.3)
- We were not chosen according to our will, but *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* (v. 4)
- We were not predestinated according to our will, but *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* (v.5a)
- We were not adopted according to our will, bit *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* (v.5b) and, (as we will see next week);
- We were not the recipients of grace and accepted according to our will, but *"according to the kind intention of His will..."* (v. 6)

The blessings of salvation as determined by our God have been ours from before the foundation of the world. It was, has been and continues to be God's kind intention and good pleasure to so wondrously save us. This same word translated "kind intention" or "good pleasure" is used by Paul in Philippians 2:13 where we read of God's work in salvation, *"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."* We see it again in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, and here I use the KJV because it uses this same phraseology, *"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power; 12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."* And let me share one more use of this word, not by Paul, but by our Lord Jesus Christ, who in Luke 12:32 said, *"Fear*

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not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is, and has always been God's good pleasure and kind intention to grant His people every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Beloved, we are more than okay if we are in Christ. We are blessed beyond imagination; the recipients of all the goodness of God and all this goodness is ours because we have been adopted into God's family, through Christ. And what is it that guarantees all of this. That pesky doctrine of predestination. Some will suggest that the doctrine of predestination is nothing but a theologically divisive teaching that has no practical value? To say such a thing is to deny Scripture. If you call yourself a child of God, it is because of divine predestination. If you believe yourself the recipient of the kind intentions of God, it is because of divine predestination. If you count yourself among the redeemed and the forgiven in Christ, it is because of divine predestination. If you have the hope and assurance of eternal life, it is because of divine predestination. And once we get this into our heads, we have but one response; a response we have already seen from verse 3 and one we will visit again in verse 6. That response is one of utter, full and weighty praise. It is *to the praise of the glory of His grace.*

If you do not find yourself responding in praise when thinking about your salvation, let me make two observations. One, perhaps you have never truly experienced salvation. Maybe you go to church; maybe you even say you believe in Jesus, but you're still trying to please God or earn your salvation somehow. If anything has been clear already in the first six verses of Ephesians 1, it is the idea of being "in Christ" – "in Him" – and "in the Beloved." If you are depending upon anything or anyone other than Christ for your salvation, they repent and confess Jesus Christ as your only Lord and Savior; pray to God that you might be found in Jesus, not with a righteousness of your own making, but with the righteousness of Christ as your only hope. Pray that God transform your heart and mind to be like Christ.

The final observation is this, if you do not find yourself responding in praise when thinking about salvation, then perhaps you have allowed the cares of this world to choke off the joy of your salvation. Pray that God would restore to you the joy of your salvation so that your life becomes again a testimony of the grace of God in salvation.

And for those of us who do ponder in wonder and praise at our salvation; may we pray that our love and our proclamation of allegiance to Jesus as Lord and Savior may increase and abound; that all who see us may ask us to give and account for the hope that is in us; that we might point people to Jesus, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

Soli Deo Gloria

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