

THE STUDY OF EPHESIANS
LESSON 2 NOTES
EPHESIANS 1:3-6

Paul begins our passage today with a glorious song of praise! Verse 3 is actually the beginning of a 202-word sentence (in the Greek) that ends with verse 14. This one sentence encompasses the past, present, and future of God's eternal purpose for the church. These verses are the outline of God's master plan for salvation.

In 3-6a we are shown the past aspect, *election*.

In 6b-11 we are shown the present aspect, *redemption*.

In 12-14 we are shown the future aspect, *inheritance*.

Within God's master plan of salvation is every believer who has or will ever trust in God and be saved. As it is sometimes expressed, history is simply the outworking of "His story," which has already been planned and prewritten in eternity past.

This one sentence can also be divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a different Person of the Trinity.

Verses 3-6a center on the Father.

Verses 6b-12 center on the Son.

Verses 13-14 center on the Holy Spirit.

Paul takes us to the very throne room of the Godhead to show the greatness and the vastness of the blessings and treasures that belong to those who are in Jesus Christ.

IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES

These abundant, unlimited blessings from God are in ***the heavenly places***. More than heaven itself is included. The heavenly places (1:20; 2:6; 3:10) encompass the entire supernatural realm of God, His complete domain, the full extent of His divine operation. Christians have a paradoxical, two-level existence—a dual citizenship.

While we remain on earth we are citizens of earth. But in Christ our primary and infinitely more important citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Christ is our Lord and King, and we are citizens of His realm, the heavenly places. That is why we are to pursue "*things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*" (Col. 3:1).

Because we are members of God's dominion, unlike the "sons of this age" (Luke 16:8), we are able to understand the supernatural things of God, things which the "*natural man does not accept*" and "*cannot understand ... because they are spiritually appraised*" (1 Cor. 2:14).

When an American citizen travels to another country, he is every bit as much an American citizen as when he is in the United States. Whether he is in Africa, the Near East, Europe, Antarctica, or anywhere else outside his homeland, he is still completely an American citizen, with all the rights and privileges that such citizenship holds. As citizens of God's heavenly dominion, Christians hold all the rights and privileges that citizenship grants, even while they are living in the "foreign" and sometimes hostile land of earth. Our true life is in the supernatural, the heavenly places. Our Father is there, our Savior is there, our family and loved ones are there, our name is there, and our eternal dwelling place is there.

CHOSE US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

God elected us ***before the foundation of the world***. Before the creation, the Fall, the covenants, or the law, we were sovereignly predestined by God to be His. He designed the church, the Body of His Son, before the world began. Because in God's plan Christ was crucified for us "*before the foundation of the world*" (1 Pet. 1:20), we were designated for salvation by that same plan at that same time. It was then that our inheritance in God's kingdom was determined (Matt. 25:34). We belonged to God before time began, and we will be His after time has long run its course. Our names as believers were "*written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain*" (Rev. 13:8).

God chose and preordained the Body before the foundation of the world in order that no human being could boast or take glory for himself, but that all the glory might be His. Salvation is not partly of God and partly of man, but entirely of God. To guarantee that, every provision and every detail of salvation was accomplished before any human being was ever born or before a planet was formed on which he could be born (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Eklegō (chose) indicates God's total independent choice. Because the verb is reflexive it signifies that God not only chose by Himself but for Himself. His primary purpose in electing the church was the praise of His own glory (Eph. 1: 6, 12, 14). Believers were chosen for the Lord's glory before they were chosen for their own good. The very reason for calling out believers into the church was that "*the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 3:10).

HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE HIM

God chose us in order that we might be ***holy and blameless***. *Amōmos* (blameless) literally means without blemish, or spotless. Because we are chosen in Him we are holy and blameless before Him. Because Jesus Christ gave Himself for us as "*a lamb unblemished and spotless*" (1 Pet. 1:19), we have been given His own unblemished and spotless nature. The unworthy have been declared worthy, the unrighteous declared holy. It is Christ's eternal and foreordained plan to "*present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless*" (Eph. 5:27; Is. 61:10).

Clearly Paul is talking about our position and not our practice. We know that in our living we are far from the holy standard and far from being blameless. Yet *“in Him,”* Paul said in another place, we *“have been made complete”* (Col. 2:10). All that God is, we become in Jesus Christ. That is why salvation is secure. We have Christ’s perfect righteousness. Our practice can and does fall short, but our position can never fall short, because it is exactly the same holy and blameless position before God that Christ has. We are as secure as our Savior, because we are in Him, waiting for the full redemption and glorious holiness that awaits us in His presence.

It would be a contradiction in terms to say that God chose a man to be in Christ and did not make him to be holy. If God ordains a man to be in Christ, then He ordains him to be a member of Christ, and there must be a conformity between Head and members. Thus, because God declares us and leads us to be holy and blameless, we should strive to live lives now that reflect the holiness and blamelessness that are our destiny.

PREDESTINED US TO ADOPTION AS SONS

Holiness is that which fits us for heaven, but adoption is that which gives us the right to the glory of heaven. *“In love having predestined us to adoption.”* God’s love of His Precious Son was so great that, having chosen us in Him, His heart went out toward us as one with Christ, and therefore He ordained us into this further honor and privilege. This agrees perfectly with *“Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called sons of God”* (1 Jn. 3:1).

It is only ***through Jesus Christ*** that we are sons and heirs of God. Christ is our pattern in election, the One to whose image we are predestinated to be conformed. Christ is God’s natural Son, and we become (by union with Christ) God’s legal sons and daughters. *“That he might be the first born among many brethren”* (Rom. 8:29) signifies that God did set up Christ as the prototype and the masterpiece, and made us to be little copies and models of Him. Every dignity we possess, every blessing we enjoy—save our election when God chose us in Him—we owe to Christ. He is the virtual cause of our adoption.

Human parents can adopt children and come to love them every bit as much as they love their natural children. They can give an adopted child complete equality in the family life, resources, and inheritance. But no human parent can impart his own distinct nature to an adopted child. Yet that is what God miraculously does to every person whom He has elected and who has trusted in Christ. He makes them sons just like His Divine Son. Christians share not only the Son’s riches and blessings but also the Son’s nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Interesting note about adoption in Paul’s day:

“Adoption, as it was practiced in the Roman world of Paul’s day, meant three things. The adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family. In the most literal sense, and in the most binding legal way, he got a new father.”

Next, he became an heir to his new father's estate. No matter how many other sons there were at the time or how many were born thereafter, he was co-heir with them. This was not subject to change.

Finally, the old life of the adoptee was completely erased. All debts were legally canceled. He was regarded by the law as a new person. A case in Roman history that shows how completely this was true: The Roman emperor Claudius adopted Nero so that Nero could succeed him as emperor. Claudius had a daughter named Octavia. Nero wished to marry Octavia to seal the alliance. Although they were not blood relations, in the eyes of the law they were now brother and sister and could not marry. The Roman senate had to pass a special law in order for them to marry.

In like manner, believers, when they are adopted, are removed from under the authority of Satan and given a new Lord, who is now also their Father. They are guaranteed an inheritance with all the children of God, of which the Holy Spirit is the down payment and guarantee. The Spirit is also the witness that adoption has taken place. Finally, they are new persons, all their sins are forgiven, and they have a clean slate before God. What a tremendous blessing to know that God has made us His own.” –Gerald Cowen

TO THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE

Why did God do all of this for us? Why did He want us to be His sons? We are saved and made sons (and daughters) **to the praise of the glory of His grace**. Above all else, He elects and saves us for His own glory. When Jesus said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32), He was affirming the delight of God in putting His glory on display. As Paul further explained, “God is at work in us ... for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

The apostle Paul interceded for the Thessalonians, praying “that our God may count you worthy of your calling ... in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him” (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

Even “the beasts of the field will glorify the Lord,” Isaiah tells us (43:20), and “the heavens tell of the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). The only rebels in the universe are fallen angels and fallen man. Everything else glorifies its Creator. The fallen angels have already been eternally removed from God’s presence, and those fallen men who will not be saved by Jesus Christ will join those angels in that eternal separation.

The ultimate reason for everything that exists is **the glory of His grace**. That is why, as God’s children, Christians should do everything they do—even such mundane things as eating and drinking—to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

ELECTION

“The amazing and most wondrous truth is that apart from eternal election there had never been any Jesus Christ, and therefore, no divine gospel; for if God had never chosen a people unto salvation, He had never sent His Son; and if He had sent no Savior, none had ever been saved. Thus, the gospel itself originated in this vital matter of election. “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13). And why are we “bound to give thanks”? Because election is the root of all blessings, the spring of every mercy that the soul receives. If election be taken away, everything is taken away, for those who have any spiritual blessing are they who have all spiritual blessings “according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:3-4).” -A.W. Pink

The doctrine of election is a disturbing doctrine for many people. Sadly, it is often portrayed and presented in a way that calls into question the goodness of God, the grace of God.

But we know from the Holy Scriptures, that from all eternity, ***before the foundation of the world***, and therefore completely apart from any merit or deserving that any person could have, God ***chose us in Him, “in Christ”*** (v. 3-4). By God’s sovereign election, those who are saved were placed in eternal union with Christ before creation even took place.

Although man’s will is not free in the sense that many people suppose, he does have a will, a will that Scripture clearly recognizes. Apart from God, man’s will is captive to sin. But he is nevertheless able to choose God because God has made that choice possible. Jesus said that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16) and that *“everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (11:26). The frequent commands to the unsaved to respond to the Lord (e. g., Josh. 24:15; Isa. 55:1; Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17; 11:28-30; John 5:40; 6:37; 7:37-39; Rev. 22:17) clearly indicate the responsibility of man to exercise his own will.

Yet the Bible is just as clear that no person receives Jesus Christ as Savior who has not been chosen by God (Rom. 8:29; 9:11; 1 Thess. 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:2). Jesus gives both truths (God’s sovereignty and free will) in one verse in the gospel of John: *“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”* (6:37).

“The reason why anyone believes in election is just this, and only this, that God has made it known. Had the Bible been a counterfeit it never could have contained the doctrine of election, for men are too averse to such a thought to give it expression, much more to give it prominence.” -G.S. Bishop

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

When we speak of divine sovereignty we are speaking about God’s authority and about God’s power. As sovereign, God is the supreme authority of heaven and earth. All other authority is

lesser authority. Any other authority that exists in the universe is derived from and dependent upon God's authority. All other forms of authority exist either by God's command or by God's permission (Ps. 103:19).

The word *authority* contains within itself the word *author*. God is the *author* of all things over which he has authority. He created the universe. He owns the universe. His ownership gives him certain rights. He may do with his universe what is pleasing to his holy will.

"God's sovereign election and man's exercise of responsibility in choosing Jesus Christ seem opposite and irreconcilable truths—and from our limited human perspective they are opposite and irreconcilable. That is why so many earnest, well-meaning Christians throughout the history of the church have floundered trying to reconcile them. Since the problem cannot be resolved by our finite minds, the result is always to compromise one truth in favor of the other or to weaken both by trying to take a position somewhere between them. We should let the conflict remain, believing both truths completely and leaving the harmonizing of them to God." –John MacArthur

For we know, the God of the Bible is both Lord and Lawgiver in His world; He is both man's King and man's Judge. Therefore, if we would be biblical in our outlook, we have to make room in our minds for the truth of divine sovereignty and of human responsibility to stand side by side.

How these two sides of God's truth—His sovereignty in choosing us (Rom. 9) and our responsibility to confess and believe (Rom. 10:9) reconcile, is impossible for us to understand fully. But Scripture declares both perspectives of salvation to be true (John 1:12-13). It is our duty to acknowledge both and joyfully accept them by faith.

J.I. Packer writes:

"All Christians believe in divine sovereignty, but some are not aware that they do, and mistakenly imagine and insist that they reject it. What causes this odd state of affairs? The root cause is the same as in most cases of error in the Church—the intruding of rationalistic speculations, the passion for systematic consistency, a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men, and a consequent subjecting of Scripture to the supposed demands of human logic.

People see the Bible teaches man's responsibility for his actions; they do not see (man, indeed, cannot see) how this is consistent with the sovereign Lordship of God over those actions. They are not content to let the two truths live side by side, as they do in the Scriptures, but jump to the conclusion that, in order to uphold the biblical truth of human responsibility, they are bound to reject the equally biblical and equally true doctrine of divine sovereignty, and to explain away the great number of texts that teach it. The desire to over-simplify the Bible by cutting out the mysteries is natural to our perverse minds, and it is not surprising that even godly men should fall victim to it. Hence this persistent and troublesome dispute.

The irony of the situation, however, is that when we ask how the two sides pray, it becomes apparent that those who profess to deny God's sovereignty really believe in it just as strongly as those who affirm it."

ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved"
(v.6 KJV).

Accepted in the Beloved means that those accepted are the objects of Divine delight!

*I am accepted in the Beloved.
I have my sorrows and griefs, I have my aches and pains, and weaknesses,
but I must not be discontent, for God accepts me.
Ah me! How one can laugh at griefs when this sweet word comes in, "accepted in the Beloved."
I may be blind, but I am "accepted in the Beloved:" I may be lame, I may be poor,
I may be despised, I may be persecuted, I may have much to put up with in many ways,
but really these troubles of the flesh count for little
or nothing to me since I am "accepted in the Beloved."
Is not this a word to die with?
We will meet death and face his open jaws with this word, "Accepted in the Beloved."
Will not this be a word to rise with amidst the blaze of the great judgment day?
God's love of His dear Son covers all believers, as a canopy covers all who come beneath it.
As a hen covers her chickens with her wings,
so God's love to Christ covers all the children of promise.
As the sun shining forth from the gates of the morning gilds all the earth with golden splendor,
so this great love of God to the Well-Beloved, streaming forth to Him,
enlightens all who are in Him.
God is so boundlessly pleased with Jesus that in Him
He is altogether well pleased with us.
-C.H. Spurgeon*

Resources:

John Calvin—Commentaries on Election & Predestination
John H. Gerstner—A Predestination Primer
John MacArthur-- New Testament Commentary
J.I. Packer – Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God
A.W. Pink—The Doctrine of Election
R.C. Sproul—Chosen By God, The Purpose of God

