

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

PREDESTINED FOR ADOPTION

Ephesians 1:3-6

I. To Have God as Father

II. Ephesians Is a Christ-Centered Book

- A. Paul wrote Ephesians to instruct and encourage Christians.
- B. One of the central themes in Ephesians—perhaps *the* central theme—is that God’s blessings are all found in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Jesus is where...
 - we receive the forgiveness of our sins (1:7).
 - we experience reconciliation with the people of God (2:13, 15).
 - we are formed into the household of God (2:21, 22).
 - God’s plans for the universe will be fulfilled (1:10).
 - 2. The grand theme of Ephesians is the Lord Jesus Christ and the life that flows from him—Ephesians is a *Christ-centered* book.
- C. The fact that we need to get through all the wonderful doctrine about the Lord Jesus before we even get to the ethical instructions (Eph 4) tells us that our ability to live the Christian life does not originate in us but in Christ.
- D. The Christian life is itself the product of Jesus Christ the Lord.
—It is an overflow of his person into the lives of each member of his church.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why did the apostle Paul write his letter to the Ephesians? (2) What place does the theme of God’s blessings-in-Christ have in Ephesians? (3) “The Christian life is itself the product of Jesus Christ the Lord. It is an overflow of his person into the life of each member of his church.” Discuss.

III. God the Father Has Blessed Us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)

- A. It is with this understanding that we come to our passage for today.
- B. To help us understand 1:5, we need to understand the preceding verses.
- C. In verse 3, Paul announces: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places [.]”
- D. If every spiritual blessing has been given to us in Christ, we can truly know contentment in our lives today.
 - 1. Godly (i.e. Christ-dependent, God-centered) contentment is important.
 - 2. We sin when we secretly crave the glories and pleasures of the world.
 - 3. We crave the glories and pleasures of the world because we perceive that we are lacking in our own persons.
 - 4. Take the craving for *security* for instance.
 - a. If we are insecure, what do we do?
 - i. We are unable to rest and play with others.

- ii. We isolate ourselves in work to the point of stress, fear, and breakdown.
 - iii. We get jealous about the successes of others.
 - iv. We get offended when our efforts are not noticed.
 - v. We yield to covetousness and scheme to take what is not ours—all in an effort to fulfill our perceived lack of power and security.
5. The similar dynamic is at work in other kinds of sin.
—We give in to temptation because we believe at some level that we are lacking in things most essential to our persons.
6. The cure for discontentment is in Ephesians 1:3—if you are in Christ, you are most certainly not lacking!
—God himself has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places [.]”
- E. Who is this God is of whom Paul speaks?
- 1. God is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - 2. There are many ideas about God floating out there.
 - 3. The Holy Spirit reveals that the only God who exists is the God who is associated with and revealed through the Lord Jesus Christ.
—God is the *Father* of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- F. God’s fatherly relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ is important because it sets the stage for his fatherly relationship to us.
- 1. In the way God has arranged things, *our* relationship to God is really patterned after *Jesus’* relationship to God.
 - 2. Our relationship to God is dependent on Jesus’ relationship to God!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does Paul announce in 1:3? What does 1:3 say about God and Christ? (2) Why is it important for believers to hold on to the truth that God has blessed us in Christ? (3) “Godly contentment is important because we fall into sin when we secretly crave the glories and the pleasures of the world.” Discuss. (4) “We give in to temptation because we believe...that we are somehow lacking in the most important things, the things that are most essential to our humanity.” (5) How is Ephesians 1:3 reveal the cure to ungodly discontentment? (6) How does Paul describe God? Who is this God is of whom Paul speaks?

IV. God the Father Chose Us in Christ (Ephesians 1:4)

- A. *Since every spiritual blessing is in Christ, how exactly do we come to be in Christ in the first place?*
- 1. Yes, we come to Christ by putting our trust in him (Gal 3:26)—but how do we even get to that point?
 - 2. Verse 4 answers: “even as *he chose us in him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”
- B. This is one of the most staggering truths in Scripture.
- 1. Many people—including Christians—struggle to accept it.
 - 2. We are able to believe in Christ and do good works because God chose us to do such things.
 - 3. God’s choice is the ultimate factor in our relationship with him.
- C. Why did God choose us in Christ?
- 1. Paul says, “that we should be holy and blameless before him.”

2. God did not choose us because we were already holy and blameless
—We weren't even around to begin with!
 3. God chose us precisely that we might become a holy and blameless people.
- D. The debate about the phrase “in love.”
1. Does “in love” belong at the end of verse 4 or the start of verse 5?
 - a. If “in love” belongs to verse 4, then the statement would read: “that we should be holy and blameless before him *in love*” (KJV, NKJV, CEV).
 - b. If “in love” belongs to the start of verse 5, then the translation would read: “*In love* he predestined us...” (ESV, NIV, NASB).
 2. What are the consequences of where we place the phrase “in love”?
 - a. If “in love” is for verse 4, it adds a specific quality to our holiness and blamelessness.
—We are chosen to be holy, blameless, and loving.
 - b. If “in love” is meant for verse 5, it expresses God’s attitude toward his people when he chooses them.
—God lovingly chooses us.
 3. The second reading may be better because it better reflects verse 6, where God blesses us “in the Beloved.”
 4. Whichever option we choose, the truth really is still the same:
 - a. God’s choosing us is generated by his love.
 - b. God’s choosing us gives rise to a life of holy love.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How exactly do we come to believe in Christ? What is God’s role in our belief in Christ? (2) Do you struggle with the idea that God chooses us for himself? Why? (3) Why, according to verse 4, did God choose us in Christ? (4) What is the result of the different placements of “in love”?

V. God Predestined Us for Adoption (Ephesians 1:5)

- A. For now, we are going with the second option.
 1. Altogether, the thought of verse 5 reads: “[In love] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”
 2. Since the word “adoption” appears here, verse 5 is very important for our study on the fatherhood of God.
- B. Consider the word adoption (*huiiothesian*).
 1. We saw this word in...
 - a. Romans 8:15: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of *adoption* as sons...”
 - b. Galatians 4:5: “to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive *adoption* as sons.”
 2. The use of “adoption” in Ephesians 1:5 makes it an important text to consider in our quest to understand the fatherhood of God.
- C. What else does verse 5a tell us about our adoption?
 1. It tells us how our adoption was made possible.
—“*he* [God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ] predestined us for adoption as sons.”
 2. The word for “predestined,” *proorizō*, means to determine beforehand.

- The fact that God “predestined” our adoption means that God planned that adoption from the very start.
3. How far back was the very start?
 - a. Was it the very start of our Christian lives? Did God decide to adopt us when we decided to receive God as Father? *No.*
 - b. Was it the very start of redemptive history, just shortly after Adam fell? *No.*
 - c. God chose us for adoption “before the foundation of the world” (v 4).
 - D. This truth fills us with confidence when we face the trials of life.
 1. If God has chosen us in Christ, it means we are precious to God.
 2. If God chose us in Christ before creation, it means God’s love for us is not dependent on anything in us.
 - E. The Holy Spirit is teaching us this: Our ability to know God as our beloved Father was God’s own idea! It was God’s plan from the very beginning of time!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to verse 5, what did God do for us? (2) Where are the other two texts that the word adoption appears? (3) How is adoption made possible? (4) What does “predestined” mean? (5) How does God’s predestination give us confidence to deal with the troubles of life?

VI. God *Lovingly* Predestined Us for Adoption (Ephesians 1:5)

- A. Consider the phrase “in love.”
- B. God’s predetermination was not a cold, disinterested act, but an exercise of divine love.
- C. Ephesians 1:5 teaches a basic truth of the Christian life—*God loves us very much.*
 1. If you belong to Christ, God loves you.
 2. God’s love for you is an ancient love rooted in eternity.
 3. God’s love for us is an extension of the love that God has for Christ himself.
 4. God’s love for us does not rest on our good behavior, nor will it be swayed by our sins.
—God’s love originates in God himself.
- D. There is sometimes a nervousness concerning the love of God.
 1. We fear taking the love of God for granted.
 2. We fear appearing soft and effeminate.
- E. But just as other Christian traditions can make too little of the sovereignty of God, we Reformed folks can make too little of the love of God.
- F. The God who does the loving in Ephesians 1 is not a feminized pagan deity.
 1. He is not *Sophia* or *Gaia*.
 2. He is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- G. The love of God is far greater than the love of our earthly parents.
 1. The love of God is the love of *God*.
 2. Since it is God-love, it cannot be anything less than human love.
—Psalm 27:10: “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.”
- H. God’s love and God’s predestination go hand in hand (cf. 1 Jn 4:19).
- I. The love of God makes the Christian life possible.

1. God's love is simply another exercise of God's power.
2. There is nothing weak or effeminate about God's love.
- J. *Do you know that God loves you? Have you accepted that he loves you in Jesus Christ?*
 1. Accepting that God loves you is a matter of obedience to his Word.
 2. If we don't think that God loves us, then we are unlikely to delight in his Word or in prayer as we ought.
 3. The result would be spiritual weakness.
 4. Let us accept the love of God, for it is with love that God has chosen us for adoption, and it is in God's love that we find our strength.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the phrase "in love" tell us about God's predestinating act? (2) "God loves you very much." Have you accepted this truth? What keeps you from accepting this truth? (3) Why are we nervous about talking about the love of God? (4) How does the love of God compare to the love of our parents? Is it greater or weaker?

VII. God Predestined Us through Christ (Ephesians 1:5)

- A. We also see that God lovingly predestined us for adoption "through Jesus Christ."
- B. God the Father is closely associated with his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
- C. In this case, we see that our predestination was done by means of Christ.
 1. God not only chose us *together with* Christ.
 2. God chose us *through* Christ.
- D. At the very least, this means that Christ had a say in who would eventually belong to him.
- E. Since we were chosen in Christ before the beginning of the world, Christ is clearly preexistent—he is the eternal, uncreated Son of God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Christ relate to our predestination? (2) What does it mean that God chose us "through Jesus Christ"?

VIII. God Predestined Us according to His Will (Ephesians 1:5)

- A. The last phrase in verse 5 is "according to the purpose of his will."
- B. God chose us for his own purposes.
 1. The word for "purpose" (*endokian*) can also be translated "good pleasure."
 2. Our predestination was due ultimately to God's good pleasure, not anything in us.
 3. If Paul believed that God chose us for what was in us—our faith, our piety, our accomplishments—he certainly missed a major opportunity to make that clear!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) On what basis did God choose us? (2)

IX. God Predestined Us for the Praise of His Grace (Ephesians 1:5c)

Why did God choose us to be his children?

- A. According to verse 4, it's so that we can be holy and blameless.

- B. Here, according to verse 6, it's "to the praise of his glorious grace..."
- C. God chose us to be his children so that...
 - we will give glory to God.
 - we will be favorably inclined toward God.
 - we will delight in God's goodness to us forever.
- D. Paul describes this reality yet another way in Ephesians 2:7.
—God has raised us in Christ "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."
- E. There is nothing stingy about our heavenly Father!
- F. One more proof that God loves us.
 1. God blessed us "in the Beloved."
 2. Jesus Christ is the beloved Son of God.
 3. Those who are in Jesus Christ partake of God's love for his beloved Christ.
- F. If we wonder how much God loves us, 1:5 should answer our question.
 1. God loves us together with Christ the Beloved.
 2. God loves us in order to show us his favor all the days of our lives.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why did God choose us? Answer according to 1:4, 6, and 2:7. (2) What kind of God do we have? What is our heavenly Father like?

X. Accept that God Has Lovingly Chosen to Be Your Father

What does our Heavenly Father want us to gain from these words in Ephesians 1? What does he want to give you and me, through these words?

God wants to give you and me a deeper sense of his fatherly love for us. He wants to give you and me the assurance that when we believed in Christ, it was because he chose us in his beloved Christ from the very beginning. From there, he wants to draw us out of ourselves, out of our fearful self-absorption, in order that we might give more and more of ourselves to him. Like a loving father, God embraces us and looks us in the eye—and says in effect: "I love you. And because I love you, I will not rest until I make you what I want you to be—holy, blameless, loving people who are like my beloved Son, Jesus Christ."

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God want to give us in Ephesians 1:3-6? (2) What are God's purposes for assuring us of his fatherly love? (3) Does knowing that God love you stir you to greater devotion to God? If not, why?