

Ephesians 1.5-6

### The Blessing of Adoption

Julius Caesar's will named his great-nephew as his heir. So, after the death of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March 44BC, Gaius Octavius Thurinus became the adopted son and heir of Gaius Julius Caesar, and in 27BC was given the name Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus. It was the discovery of this adoption that began his rise from a military cadet trying to find his way in the world to becoming the first emperor of Rome. In this text Paul calls us to give praise to God who has adopted us as His sons through Jesus Christ. Through this adoption God raises us not only from obscurity to royalty, but from death to life.

**God predestined us as a smiling Father.** Adoption emphasizes the Father's power, what the Romans called *patria potestas*, the absolute power of the father in the family. Paul draws attention to the prerogative and initiative of the Father in adoption when he adds "according to the good pleasure of *His will*." No one could force the Roman father to receive someone into His family to enjoy the privileges of sonship. This was entirely up to the father. Likewise, we are brought in by the absolute, sovereign will of the Father. The term "predestined" has to do with the goal God determined for our lives. By His own design in accordance with His own desire God determined that we would be His adopted children.

Now, adoption was always to the advantage of the one adopted. Octavian was adopted by Julius Caesar to his advantage. So, God has chosen us and predestined us for adoption as a Spiritual blessing. God's decree of election, which is one side of God's predestining, is not the mechanical outworking of impersonal fate. Predestination to adoption is God's personal and gracious plan for us "in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make [us] partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation." With all of these good blessings to bestow, God does not mechanically and dispassionately make us his sons. He adopts us with great delight in doing us good. He adopts us with joy in giving us Himself as a Father.

William Cowper's poem "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" says, "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face." Our text begins "In love He predestined us." Out of a loving heart and willing disposition God chose us and predestined us to be adopted. The phrase that the ESV translates "according to the purpose" should be translated "according to the good pleasure." Purpose is εὐδοκία, "good pleasure"; "as it seemed good to Him." This is not indifference. This is intellectual delight. God had a grand idea, a master plan, that thrilled Him; it pleased Him. In fact, the ESV for some reason does not translate another phrase that points to God's delight in predestining us to adoption. εἰς αὐτόν "for Himself"—is a dative of advantage, meaning that God ordained our adoption, not just thinking of our welfare, but for His own enjoyment.

The use of the term translated "good pleasure" led one commentator to observe, "Not a grim Lord watching over the execution of His predetermined plan, but a *smiling* Father is praised. He *enjoys*

imparting His riches to many children.” [Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, AB, 81]

Those who see God in Christ can look upon the smiling face of a Father who lovingly chose them as His children.

### **God predestined us to be beloved children.**

Adoption speaks of our new circumstances. Regeneration, or being born again, refers to the new nature that we have in salvation. Paul says in 2 Cor 5.17 “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” But adoption points, not to our new nature, but to our new circumstances. When a Roman adopted a son to be his heir, the adopted son assumed a new name with a new status, new privileges, new possessions, new obligations and new allegiances.

A new name – The prophet Hosea’s marriage and children were symbols of God’s relationship with Israel. His wife was unfaithful to him, as Israel whored after other gods, committing spiritual adultery against God. Yet, like the LORD, Hosea forgave her and received her back as his wife. His children were given names that not only represented the spiritual condition of Israel, but also the spiritual condition of humanity apart from Christ. Hosea 1.6, 9, 10; 2.1 “She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, ‘Call her name Lo-ruhamah [No Mercy], for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. . . . When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, “Call his name Lo-ammi [Not My People], for you are not My people, and I am not yours.” What horrible names, representing horrible realities! But then comes this promise, “Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them ‘You are not My people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God.’ . . . Say to your brothers, ‘You are My people,” and to your sisters, ‘You have received mercy.’” This name change is not only for those Jews who returned to God by His grace. It is also for the Gentiles, who were Lo-ammi, “Not My People.” In Romans 9.24-26 Paul says of the vessels of mercy that were prepared beforehand for glory, “even us whom He has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles—As indeed He says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not My people I will call My People, and her who was not beloved I will call Beloved. And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they will be called sons of the living God.’” By adoption through Christ you have a new name—from “Not My People” to “My People”; from “No Mercy” to “Mercy”; from “Not Beloved” to “Beloved.” Notice that this blessing begins with love—“in love He predestined us”—and it ends with love as He has blessed us “in the Beloved.” Jesus is the Beloved of the Father. In Christ, we are also Beloved of the Father. This means that we are caught up in the eternal and infinitely immense love that God the Father has for God the Son. This is exactly what Jesus, our High Priest and covenant head, asked for in John 17.20-26: “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me *and loved them even as You loved Me*. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My

glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, *that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them*, and I in them.” THE LOVE WITH WHICH GOD LOVED HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON IS THE LOVE HE GIVES TO YOU!! Your new name—The LORD’s Beloved.

A new status, new privileges, new possessions—Eph 2.12 “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” That is what we had. This is what we now have by adoption through Christ-- Eph 2.13, 18-19 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . . For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” This “being brought near” and having “access . . . to the Father” is the essence of the inheritance spoken of in 1.13. We have this blessing in part now, but it is an inheritance to which we look forward with confident expectation in the future. Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, then we shall know fully even as we are also fully known (1 Cor 13.12). We have a new status as fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. We have the new privilege of calling God “Father” and approaching Him in prayer as His children. Kevin was given access to Colonel Hunt because they shared the same name.

New obligations and allegiances—Jesus said to His opponents in John 8.44 “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.” Apart from Christ we were children of the devil. Our allegiance was with him, against God. Paul says, in Ephesians 2.1-2 “And you were dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” Our will was in bondage to sin, and our desire was to do the will of the devil, the spirit that is at work in the sons of disobedience. Jesus and Paul say this not only of the sexually immoral and idolatrous. They say this also of those whose righteousness according to the law would be considered blameless by their neighbors. Apart from Christ, even our religious devotion is selfish, full of worldly ambition and hostility toward God. Through the cross, Christ reconciles us to the Father so that we have peace with God. He turns us from being enemies of God to being the children of God. Now, as His children, we have new obligations and allegiances. Rather than fighting for satan against God, we are fighting with God against satan. As we will see later in this epistle, “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” We “withstand in the evil day.” And “stand firm” having donned the whole armor of God—emblazoned with the family crest—it’s our Father’s armor!

Security—In Roman law, adoption was one of the most legally binding relationships. It is said that it was easier to disown one’s own flesh and blood than to disinherit an adopted son, since the honor of Roman justice stood behind adoption. To speak of adoption, then, is to speak of a binding, secure relationship. Paul communicates this by his emphasis on grace. Literally translated, verse 6 reads “to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has graced us in the Beloved.” He uses both the noun and the cognate verb of the same Greek word for “grace.” Since our adoption is all of grace, and all of God’s pleasure

and will, it does not depend on us. If it depended on us we would never have assurance. Since it depends on God, we can have assurance.

When I was about six years old, my father and I were walking to church one Sunday morning. Between the house and the church a narrow road cut through about half a mile of wood. As we were walking along, suddenly, my dad said, "Josh! Look out!" Well, I thought he was playing with me so I just kept stepping. The next thing I know, my dad has grabbed me under the arm and lifted me off the ground. Still, I thought he was just playing. Then he said, "Son, look down where you were about to step." What I saw when I looked down was a monstrous snake large enough to swallow a small horse. (Remember, I was six. I'm just telling it like I saw it.) Once I realized the peril I had been in, I clung to my father's arm for all I was worth, which at six wasn't very much. Now I was determined to hold on, lest I fall prey to the dragon slithering just below me. Of course, if it were up to me to hold on, my puny little six year old arms would have given way, and I would not be alive to tell you this story today! But, thankfully, it wasn't up to me. Before I even knew I was in danger, my father already laid hold of me and lifted me with his much stronger arm. My feeble efforts couldn't save me, but his strong arms kept me safe that day.

Beloved, your security does not come from the strength of your faith or the power of your will. The everlasting safety of your soul is in the hands of your Father. Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10.28-29). Cling to Him with all of your might, love Him with all of your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. But know this—that before you ever knew you were in danger He already had you in His hand; and He will never, no, never let you go. God predestined us as a smiling Father. God predestined us to be His beloved children.

**God predestined us to the praise of His glorious grace.** The children's catechism asks three pertinent questions right up front. Who made you? "God made me." What else did God make? "God made all things." Why did God make you and all things? "For His own glory." God made all things, and God does all things for His own glory. Until you come to grips with the God-centeredness of all reality you will struggle to understand the Bible He authored, the world He created, and your own life that He gave you. God predestined us for adoption "to the praise of His glorious grace." The concept of glory grows, in the Old Testament, from a word that means weighty. It is then used figuratively of something or someone who is important. Even in English, weighty words are important words to be taken seriously. To speak, then, of "the glory of His grace" or "glorious grace" is to speak of a grace that is weighty and to be revered. We recognize the propriety of godly fear in light of God's majesty and power. But we should be just as awestruck, humbled, and flat on our faces breathless at the thought of His grace. It grieves me to hear John Newton's "Amazing Grace" sung by unbelievers in some secular context as though it were just some interesting folk song. The grace of God is not some light fluffy sunbeam in my soul that reminds me that I'm special. The grace of God is a profound mystery that I can scarcely conceive even with the light of revelation, and would never believe without the assurance of God's Word and Spirit that this is indeed so.

The grace of God is so weighty, so serious, so glorious, because it entails the wretched condition we were in, the new privileged status we inherit, the free, unconditional nature of this gift, and the terrible cost of it all to God. Paul takes us there in the very next verse that we will look at next week, “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” In 2.13 we’ve “been brought near by the blood of Christ.” In 2.16 He reconciled us to God “through the cross.” “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (5.25). The weight of glory that we see and experience and praise and sing of in our adoption can be no less than the weight of the cross on the shoulders of Christ; no less than the weight of the blows that drove the thorns into His brow and nailed His hands and feet to that tree; no less than the weight of our iniquities for which He was crushed as He bore the chastisement that brought us peace. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53.6).

Now, you have been adopted “to the praise of His glorious grace.” So how are you going to extol the glory of this grace? That’s the burning question for us in every decision we have to make. How am I going to show the world the glory of God’s grace in this decision? Young woman, you have a man who is outside of Christ who finds you fascinating. He’s kind to you and makes you feel special when he shows you attention. But he doesn’t love your Jesus. He doesn’t love the One who loved you with an everlasting love. He doesn’t love the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. How are you going to extol God’s glorious grace in your adoption when this guy wants a more serious relationship with you? Christian friend, you’ve been offended by someone who hurt you, and seeks your forgiveness. Are you going to harbor bitter feelings? Are you going to let him go scot free? How are you going to extol God’s glorious grace in your adoption when someone seeks your forgiveness? In this ailing economy, you’ve managed to come into a large sum of money without breaking the law!! What are you going to do? Are you going to raise your standard of living accordingly? Are you going to buy yourself a little treat since everyone says you deserve it? How are you going to extol God’s glorious grace in your adoption with your disposable income?

Are you living the life of a child of God? This adoption through Christ is not a business arrangement to make sure someone is around to manage the business after the father is dead and gone. Our Father is not going anywhere! He has called us into this relationship so that we are His, and He is ours. Enjoy the access you have to your Father in prayer. Delight in the access you have to your Father in His Word. Rejoice in the love the Father has for you. Find your life in Him. Find your home in His household. Don’t trade the glory of the children of God for all that this world has to offer. Paul says in 2.7 that God saved us by grace “so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” God will display the glory of His grace in us “in the coming ages.” Is His glorious grace being displayed through you in this age?