

EPHESIANS 1:5b  
The Wonderful Work of Salvation  
Message 13, March 7, 1999

INTRO: Last fall my wife and I attended the Billy Graham School of Evangelism and the MC for all the plenary sessions was Allen Dunbar. Allen used to be a pastor in Calgary and is not the president of a Bible School in the US. Allen was disowned by his parents and was tossed from place to place until he was adopted. One beautiful sunny day, at mid-morning break time, I went up to Allen and asked him if his testimony was available by tape. To my dismay, he did not know of an available tape of his personal testimony. I knew back then that we were coming to this message on adoption. You see, Allen knew what it was, not only to be unwanted (some of you may know that as well), no Allen knew what it was to be disowned by his blood parents. He knew what it was to be shuffled from one place to another, always to find out he was not wanted there either. I suppose he knew what it was to have potential adoption parents come, only to have someone else chosen rather than him. But Allen also knew what it was like to be chosen by a loving Christian couple.

In our Romans study course Maxwell writes this, "Many children have suffered untold agonies from the jibes of their playmates, that they were merely adopted. One such sufferer retorted to his persecutor: "Listen, fellow, your father had to take you because he had not choice, but my father chose me." The other day I went back to the notes I took at the Evangelism school and here is what Allen Dunbar said, "I'm an adopted kid. I wasn't expected, I was selected." Isn't that good!

I want you to look at our text this morning, reading from Ephesians 1:4-5. I mentioned in our last message that I find three things we are predestined to. Never ever does the Bible even hint that we are predestined to heaven or hell. No, and furthermore, from all I can find only Christians are predestined; and that to three things as stated in Scripture. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. We are predestined to exist to the praise of His glory. And in our text this morning, we are predestined to adoption. That is the subject matter of this morning's message.

The word adoption is the Greek word *hiosthesia*, and simply means the placing of a son. It is to place someone who is not your own child as your own child.

c. God predestined us in Christ (1:5-6)

1) How God predestined us (5a)

2) What God predestined us to (5b)

The context in which predestination took place was that of love. But God had a goal in mind when He predestined us. We have seen already that God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. We have seen in verse four that God's ultimate goal for our lives is that we should be holy and without blame before Him. I have mentioned to you that the words *before Him* speak of the time when we are ushered into His presence. It does not speak of here and now.

I have been asked if that means God does not have in mind for us to be holy and without blemish right now. Yes, God wants us to be holy and without blemish. Picture an apple tree. Let's say it is May. What do you expect? Nice ripened, red apples? Of course not. First you expect buds. If your tree starts off nice and early with buds, it is perfect for that time of year. You might see that in April. Then you expect to see blossoms. You do not go out in May and say, "Oh my. I thought I ordered an apple tree, and look at that. I've got a flower tree. What kind of company is this anyway!" If it is full of blossoms in May, it is perfect for that stage. And so we might illustrate further from month to month until the harvest.

Now let us say we have a new believer. He's been a Christian now for one week and we go to check up on him. So we say, "Do you get up at 5:00 AM each morning for devotions? And he says, "What are

devotions?". Then you ask, "Do you read 10 chapters in the Bible each day?" And he looks at you incredulously and says, "There are chapters in the Bible?" Then you say, "Listen buddy. I thought you were a Christian. But you are no Christian. Don't you know what a Christian is supposed to do?" Now you say, "That's ridiculous. You've got to give him a chance to grow."

Well, God does want us to be holy and without blame but He does not expect the ultimate kind of perfection until the end. And in Ephesians 1:4 the end is in view, not the process.

Now I propose to you this morning that in the words *having predestined us to adoption* we have goal in mind. I teach the doctrine of salvation from time to time in Bible school. I used to teach this doctrine along the same lines it is taught in most theology books. But of late I have come to question the standard view of adoption. This last year when I taught the doctrine again I did more serious study on this topic. It is fascinating. It is not a major doctrine, but like all other secondary doctrines it could not be classed as unimportant.

Our question this morning is why does Paul say we are predestined to adoption? Why does he not say we are predestined to justification or sanctification or vocation and so on? Well, the answer is because we are not predestined to justification or sanctification etc... We are predestined to adoption. And why to adoption? Well, actually we have to back up even further and ask, "Why does Paul speak of adoption at all?" Now if we do not answer this question we will not understand this text. These words are then meaningless to us. Here is a question we must ask, "Who needs adoption?" Well, I

can tell you who needs adoption. It is children who do not have biological parents to take care of them. If one has parents or one parent to whom one was born, and is takes care of you by that parent or parents then one does not need adoption.

Now here is the crucial question, are we born of God or do we need to be adopted? Well, we consult another doctrine, the doctrine of regeneration. So we go to our doctrinal book the Catechism to question 7 on Regeneration and Good Works. Question: Who brings about regeneration in us? Answer: God Himself brings about regeneration in us by His Word and Spirit..." The references given in the Catechism are 1 Peter 1:3; James 1:18; and John 3:5 (Read them).

Now our question is are we born of God or do we need to be adopted? Well you say, It sounds like we need both. But whoever needs both? If you are born into a family and they take care of you do you still need adoption? Of course not! This is unheard of in human relationships.

Therefore, we have before us a biblical problem. Now let me give you the standard answer to our dilemma. Adoption was not a Jewish practice but a Roman one. Paul uses the illustration of a Roman practice. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones writes, "Under Roman law adoption secured for the adopted child a right to the name and to the property of the person by whom he had been adopted. The moment a child was adopted by a person, that child had a legal right, an absolute legal right, to make such claims" (109-110). So Jones argues that in regeneration we are given a new nature. You see, an adopted son differs from his adopting parents in nature. He is not the biological son. So in the new birth, Jones says we receive a new nature. But, he

says, in adoption we are given a new rank and legal position. Adoption affects our position, not our nature. Regeneration affects our nature.

Now that may all be well and good. But I am still unsatisfied. The reason is this. When I receive the nature of my parents, I also receive rank and legal standing. And I retain that rank and legal standing as long as my parents own and care for me. And God will never disown me as long as I walk with Him, therefore in regeneration, I receive a new nature, a new rank and a new standing. I do not need adoption. So if that be the case why does Paul yet speak of adoption?

Now that we understand the question better, let me propose another possible answer to you. The essential difference between an adopted son and a born son is one of nature. The adopted son does not have the biological nature of his parents. Man has three major components; body, soul and spirit. These three can be broken down to two essences. There is the physical and material part, the body. This is called in Scripture the outward man (2 Cor. 4:16). Then there is the spiritual part of man. This part is not material. The non-material or spiritual part of man is the soul and the spirit. These two parts are called the inward or inner man (2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16).

In the new birth or regeneration, it is the inner man that is born again (Jn. 3:5-6). In the passages noted in our Catechism we find that we are the sons of God, not by adoption but by birth, new birth or rebirth. My proposition is that we are talking about the inner man. But our outer man is not born again (Jn. 3:3-4). Nicodemus made the mistake of thinking that when Jesus spoke of being born again that He was speaking of the physical part

of man, the outer man. Jesus said, "He that lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" He was speaking of the inner man. In Hebrews we are told that it is appointed to man once to die but after this the judgement. There we are speaking of the outer man. The outer man is not born again and therefore it is appointed to man once to die. This body must go.

Now I said that the essential difference between a born son and an adopted one is one of nature. With regard to our inner man we have a divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). With regard to our inner man we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). With regard to our outer man we do not have a divine nature. We have a fallen human nature. Our outer nature is not like the nature of God. Even when we are resurrected our outer nature will not be like God. God does not have a physical body. And so my proposition to you this morning is that adoption speaks of our outer man and adoption has not yet taken place. It will take place when I am resurrected and given a new body. And because my physical nature is different from the nature of God, God will adopt me physically. The essential difference between my nature and God's nature is the physical aspect of me and therefore the doctrine of adoption.

The apostle Paul speaks of adoption in only five verses and he is the only one to speak of this doctrine (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). (Read Gal. 4:1-7). Now adoption is usually presented as happening in the present at the time of salvation and in the future, at the time of the resurrection. References to prove that adoption takes place at salvation are those references that refer to believers as being the sons of God. I have not time to argue this all in detail but I believe every reference referring to the believer

as being a child or son of God are references to regeneration. I further believe that adoption takes place at one time only and that time is future. I believe adoption has to do primarily with the physical body and that it will take time at the resurrection of the just or the rapture (Romans 8:18-23).

CONCL: We conclude then that God has a plan for the believer. This we find in the word predestination. We saw in our last message that God predestined us in the context of love and that it is in love that He shapes and conforms us to the image of Christ. Today we have seen the aim of God's plan. We have seen the final end of all the chisseling and whittling. We see the believer being received bodily into the presence of God. I assure you this morning that God is not whittling and shaping your life with no goal in mind. He has a for your life and that plan is to result in being received into the family of God bodily. In this body you and I will be able to travel back to earth. When the new heavens and new earth are in place we will live there physically.