

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## PREDESTINED TO ADOPTION

Ephesians 1:5-6

By

Steven J. Cole

July 22, 2007

© Steven J. Cole, 2007

For access to previous sermons or to subscribe to weekly sermons via email go to: [www.fcfonline.org/sermons](http://www.fcfonline.org/sermons)

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture  
Quotations are from the New American  
Standard Bible, Updated Edition  
© The Lockman Foundation

July 22, 2007  
Ephesians Lesson 4

Predestined to Adoption  
Ephesians 1:5-6

I read an article recently about a trend among well-off or retired Americans to spend their own money to travel to needy parts of the world to work as volunteers. The woman writing the article had spent two weeks at an orphanage in Romania. She spent her time giving focused attention to some handicapped children who are hardly ever touched, cared for, or loved. One woman who stayed on after the other volunteers went home reported that the children were mostly neglected, left with squalid diapers and no one to give them any attention. Because most of the children in the orphanage have physical or mental handicaps, they are not sought after for adoption.

Before you and I met Jesus Christ, we were in far worse condition than the worst of these poor orphans. Even if we were decent, moral, responsible people in the eyes of the world, from the standpoint of God, who is absolutely holy, we were like newborn infants who had been thrown into a field. We were filthy and squirming in our blood, left to die (this is God's description in Ezek. 16:2-6). Our sins, whether pride, lust, greed, selfishness, anger, or whatever, rendered us abhorrent in God's holy sight. There was no merit in us, that He would choose us to be His children. And yet, to the praise of the glory of His grace, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will" (1:5)!

That is the amazing spiritual blessing that Paul wants us to contemplate in these verses. He is saying,

The fact that God blessed us by predestining us to adoption  
as His children should cause us to praise Him  
for the glory of His grace in Christ.

Praising God for the lavishness of His grace is Paul's theme here. He begins this section by exclaiming (1:3), "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." He con-

cludes this first section by directing us back to praising God, the source of our blessings (1:6), “to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” Central to the apostle’s thinking is that God chose us (1:4) and predestined us (1:5) to these amazing blessings. Thus any teaching that subverts or diminishes God’s sovereignty in our salvation also subverts or diminishes the praise that is due to His name. When we understand that God chose us and predestined us to be His children, we will be caught up in wonder, love, and praise.

1. God blessed us by predestining us to adoption as His children (1:5).

The Bible uses two similar, yet different analogies to picture our salvation from different angles. One is that of regeneration, or the new birth. We become God’s children by being born spiritually into His family (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8). Yet at the same time, we are also God’s adopted children. The emphasis in regeneration is that we receive new life from God. The emphasis in adoption is that we receive a new legal standing and relationship with God because He chose us to be full members of His family. Note four things:

- A. Adoption is both a present reality and yet a future promise to be fulfilled.

Adoption was a relatively rare practice in ancient Israel, but it was a common practice in the first century Greco-Roman world. The adopted son was taken legally into his new family and assumed all of the rights and responsibilities associated with that new family.

Theologically, Paul is the only New Testament writer to use this term (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). In Romans 8:15-17, Paul writes about the present reality of our adoption: “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!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.” The picture here and in Galatians 4:5-7 is that of moving from the status of slaves to that of sons and heirs. Thus we presently enjoy all of the privileges of being members of God’s family.

Yet, in Romans 8:23 Paul writes of a future aspect of our adoption: "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." So on the one hand, we enjoy our new standing as children in God's family, being able to call Him "Father." And yet, on the other hand, our adoption will not be finalized until we get our new resurrection bodies when Jesus returns.

- B. God's predestining us to adoption means that our relationship with Him is based on His sovereign, loving purpose and thus is secure.

The word "predestined" does *not* imply impersonal, deterministic fate. It means to mark out or decide beforehand and refers to God's plan for the ages. It is reasonable that an all-wise God had a plan in mind before He created the universe. Being God, He has the inherent ability to carry out His plans. Part of His plan to glorify Himself was to reach down to the gutters of sin and adopt certain miserable street urchins to be His own sons and daughters. There was nothing attractive or desirable about us that prompted God to adopt us into His family. To the contrary, we were repulsive to God because of our sin. But His great love took pity on us and snatched us out of the gutter. He cleaned us up, clothed us with His righteousness, and brought us to His house and banquet table, where we enjoy every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Whether the phrase "in love" goes with verse 4 or with verse 5, there are several other verses that connect God's choosing us for salvation with His love. Note just two (others are, Col. 3:12; Rom. 9:25): in 1 Thessalonians 1:4, Paul says, "knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you." In 2 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul repeats to the same church, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

In our text, Paul states that God predestined us to adoption "according to the kind intention of His will." "Kind intention" is a single Greek word that means "good pleasure." It means that God chose us and predestined us to be His children apart from any

cause in us, but rather simply because it pleased Him to do so. It excludes any personal merit as the basis for God's action.

The practical point of this truth, that God "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will," is that it gives us solid assurance of salvation. If we are saved because of any goodness or merit or faith that stems from our corrupt hearts, then we are on shaky ground, because we never know if we have enough of whatever it is to qualify us for salvation. But if our salvation stems from God's choice and purpose, which He determined before He created the world, then we have a sure foundation. And, if you ask, "How can I know that I am one of God's elect?" let me answer in John Calvin's words (*Sermons on Ephesians* [Banner of Truth], p. 47): "How do we know that God has elected us before the creation of the world? By believing in Jesus Christ." Related to this is the third truth in verse 5:

C. God's predestining us to adoption is through Jesus Christ, not through anything in us.

Everything that we have from God is in Christ and comes to us because He was willing to go to the cross to secure our salvation. God blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3). He chose us in Christ (1:4). He predestined us to adoption through Jesus Christ (1:5). He freely bestowed His grace on us in Christ, "the Beloved" (1:6). He redeemed us in Christ (1:7). He purposed all of these blessings "in Him" (1:9). We obtained an inheritance in Him (1:10-11). It is *all* in and through Jesus Christ and *not at all* in or through anything in us. So, He gets *all* the glory!

D. God's predestining us to adoption means that we now enjoy all of the privileges and responsibilities of being God's children.

It always brings a loving father great joy to watch his children light up with delight when they open a birthday or Christmas gift. Or, sometimes, just because you love your kids, you surprise them with a gift for no other reason except that they are your kids. Even so, the heavenly Father delights to pour out His blessings upon His chosen, adopted children. Here are just a few (for more, see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Zondervan], pp. 739-742):

(1) We are now in a close, personal relationship with our loving Father.

“He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ *to Himself*” (1:5). A wealthy businessman could adopt some poor children from an orphanage and give them everything that money can buy. But what if the businessman were too busy with his many enterprises to spend any time with the children? No doubt, their physical situation is better than it was when they were in the orphanage. But every child craves to know and be loved by his father.

God not only bestows on us all the wealth of His spiritual blessings in Christ; He also brings us into an intimate relationship with Him, where we now know Him as “Abba! Father!” Abba was a Hebrew term of endearment meaning, “Daddy,” or “Papa.” While I’m uncomfortable addressing God as “Daddy” (it always strikes me as a bit too irreverent), the glorious truth is that we can draw near to His loving arms and know that He will receive us as His beloved children! Adoption emphasizes our new relationship with our heavenly Father.

(2) We are heirs with Jesus Christ.

As we saw in Romans 8:17, in the context of adoption, “and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.” God’s riches are our riches, not in the sense of the heretical “prosperity gospel,” but in the sense that He will supply our needs “according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Because our physical bodies are frail and life is short, our greatest needs are spiritual and eternal. In that sense, God has given us the gift of eternal life in Christ and throughout eternity we will discover the riches of our inheritance in Him. Related to this...

(3) Our eternal future is secure.

If a poor orphan were adopted by a multimillionaire, we would say, “He’s fixed for life.” He would have everything he ever needs as far as material comforts go. Being adopted by God means that we are fixed for eternity. God has written us into the will, so to speak. Because He did it totally by His grace and not at all because of anything in us, it is certain that He will keep His promises.

(4) We are brothers and sisters in God’s forever family.

Adoption brings us into a new relationship with all of God's children, no matter what their national or economic background. It is always a wonderful experience when I've been able to visit other countries to meet people I've never met before and instantly feel the bond of love and brotherhood that we share in Jesus Christ. In Christ, racial and economic barriers are abolished. The local church should reflect the racial and economic makeup of the community. Also, the local church should function as a family, with young and old being together, caring for one another, and learning from each other. As family, we should enjoy hanging out with the saints, getting to know one another and sharing in the things of God.

Much more could be said, but I need to move on to the practical application of our adoption:

2. Being adopted by God should cause us to praise Him for the glory of His grace in Christ (1:6).

Verse six goes all the way back to verse 3, showing that all of God's spiritual blessings in Christ lead to the praise of the glory of His grace. But verse 5 shows that one such blessing is God's predestining us to adoption as sons and daughters. Note four things:

- A. Anything that robs God of His glory in our salvation is not from Him.

The Hebrew word translated *glory* has the literal meaning of "weight," and thus points to God's worthiness, reputation, and honor. The Greek word comes from a word meaning to think or seem. Thus it has the idea of God's reputation. His glory is the revealed magnificence or splendor of His attributes and presence.

Here Paul focuses on one attribute that evokes our praise, the glory of God's grace, His undeserved favor. If we mix any of our merit, worth, or works with His grace, we pollute it and detract from His glory. As Calvin wrote (*The Institutes of the Christian Religion* [Westminster Press], ed. by John McNeill, 3:13:2), "we never truly glory in him unless we have utterly put off our own glory.... whoever glories in himself, glories against God."

As Paul implies in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," the essence of sin is to fail to glorify God. So the main goal of our salvation, which rests on God's choosing and predestining us, should be to bring us to a realization

of the glory of God, where we boast only in Him. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, where three times he repeats, "God has chosen." Then he adds that it is by God's doing that we are in Christ Jesus (1:30) and concludes (1:31), "so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

- B. To praise God properly for the glory of His grace in Christ, we must remember what we were before His grace found us.

We can never truly appreciate God's grace until we get the biblical perspective on the depths of sin from which God rescued us. As Paul will go on to say (Eph. 2:1-3), we were dead in our sins, sons of disobedience, and children of wrath. To use the adoption analogy, we were not clean, well-mannered, bright, attractive children with great potential when God picked us for adoption. Rather, we were dirty, defiled, disobedient, disrespectful, and defiant. There was nothing in us to draw God towards us. Rather (Rom. 5:8), "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

- C. To praise God properly for the glory of His grace in Christ, we must recognize the extravagance of His grace.

Paul piles up words to emphasize how extravagant God's grace is. The phrase, "His grace, which He freely bestowed on us," is literally, "His grace, which He graced on us." (The KJV translation, that we are "accepted in the Beloved" is more of a paraphrase.) Paul goes on to talk about (1:7-8) "the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." Later, when describing how God raised us from spiritual death, Paul says (2:4-5), "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

Then, in case you missed it, two verses later he says (2:7), "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Did you still miss it? He repeats (2:8-9), "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." How can anyone, much less an entire branch of Christendom, read these verses and then teach

that we must add our good works to what Christ has done in order to be saved? Our salvation is entirely due to God's extravagant grace. All the glory and praise goes to Him alone!

D. To praise God properly for the glory of His grace in Christ, we must see that He gave His beloved Son for our salvation.

Paul says (1:6) that God freely bestowed His grace on us "in the Beloved." Why does Paul use that designation of Jesus Christ here? There could be several reasons. The eternal love that exists between the Father and the Son is a perfect love. When the Father adopts us into His family, we are drawn into this circle of infinite, perfect love (John 15:9). In Jesus' great prayer for His disciples just before the cross, He prays (John 17:23), "I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." What a staggering thought, that the Father loves us even as He loves His own Son! So Paul calls Jesus "the Beloved" to show that we are now in this relationship of love with the Father and the Son.

Also, Paul may call Jesus "the Beloved" to show the great price that God paid to adopt us as His children. Jesus was supremely God's beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased (Matt. 3:17; Col. 1:13; Luke 20:13). Yet the Father and the Son were willing to interrupt this perfect relationship of love so that the Son could go to the cross and endure the wrath of the Father on our behalf! As Paul writes (Rom. 8:32), "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Sometimes people ask, "Why couldn't God just forgive our sins without Jesus needing to die? If someone offends me, I can just forgive him. Why couldn't God do that?" The answer is, because God is absolutely holy and you are not! God's holiness and justice demand that the penalty for sin be satisfied. His love moved Him to send His own Son to pay that penalty as the substitute for all who believe on Him. Because the Son of God paid the price, the Father is free to adopt us who were sinners into His family. He covers us with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, giving us the full standing as His children and heirs. Amazing grace!

## Conclusion

There is a story in the Old Testament that is difficult to understand, unless you view it in light of the cross. God promised to give Abraham a son, but He withheld the fulfillment of that promise for over 25 years, until Abraham was 100 years old. Finally, Isaac, the son of the promise, was born. You can imagine how much the old man loved his son! He doted on that boy as he watched him grow. But then, when Isaac was probably in his teens, God told Abraham to do something that is utterly shocking (Gen. 22:2), "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

How could God do that? It goes against His commandment, that we should love one another! It is incomprehensible to any loving parent how God could command such a thing! It is equally shocking that Abraham proceeded to obey God without any word of complaint or any request for an explanation! He didn't know yet that God would provide the ram as a substitute.

Why is that incident in Scripture? It's there to show us in graphic, emotional terms what the Father did for us by not sparing His own Son to secure our salvation. We should keep the wonders of His redeeming love before us every day. "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (1:5-6)! Praise God for the glory of His freely bestowed grace!

## Application Questions

1. Some say that the doctrine of predestination is just a divisive theological debate with no practical value. Why is this not so? What are several practical implications of this truth?
2. Why is it crucial to insist that even saving faith comes from God, not from us? What is at stake?
3. Can someone who insists that salvation depends in part on us consistently believe that our salvation is eternally secure? Why/why not?
4. What are some other practical benefits of God's adopting us?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 2007, All Rights Reserved.