

ADOPTED, OR TRUE SONS?

Ephesians 1:5-6

Galatians 3:22-4:7

Intro: In connection with our Day of Prayer I called your attention to what is generally agreed upon by Bible teachers as the five types of prayer that are found in the Bible. I have repeated them for you in the requests that are given in our Tableau for today. They are confession, worship, thanksgiving or praise, intercession, and petition. It is important for us to confess any known sin to the Lord when we come to Him in prayer. Next God is delighted with our worship when we are thinking of Him, delighting in the God that He is, and telling Him so. After that we need to thank the Lord for the blessings we have received from Him, mentioning them specifically to Him. And it is good to remember our spiritual blessings as well as material and physical blessings for which we want to give thanks to the Lord. At this point we are ready to present our requests to Him on behalf of others – our family members and other relatives, people we are especially burdened about, and others who come to our minds. This is intercession. It is good to keep a prayer list of those we want to pray for. We may or may not know of specific needs. This is not necessary. The Lord knows their needs, and that is what is important. Finally, we need to bring our own needs to the Lord. We call this petitions.

Sometimes our prayers will fall into more than one of these categories at the same time, but generally this is the order in which our prayers should be prayed.

We have seen in reading the first chapter of Ephesians that the whole chapter is a prayer – actually several prayers. Verse 2 is a prayer of intercession for the believers in Ephesus. Verses 3 through 14 would fall into possibly two categories: worship (“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”), and praise. And then beginning with verse 15 and going to the end of chapter 1 we have the first of Paul’s two lengthy intercessory prayers for the believers in Ephesus. The second is in chapter 3. When you read over these prayers you can say that the Apostle Paul actually was teaching in his prayers, and that is why he wrote them out. We would do well to pray like Paul prayed. The best way to learn how to pray is by studying the prayers of the Bible, both OT and NT. Too often we learn to pray by listening to others pray, and that is fine if we are listening to the right people. But sometimes we learn from the wrong

people because they may have learned from the wrong people. I have read more than one comment about Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great English pastor who lived in the nineteenth century, that his prayers were as effective as his sermons. That was saying a lot because his sermons were among the best you would ever hear.

But studying Ephesians, and looking especially at verse 3 of chapter 1, we see that Paul gave praise to God for all of the blessings of salvation. He said that God had given every blessing to every believer that was necessary for our salvation. I don't have any blessing that you don't have, and you don't have any blessing that I don't have. We need to know what they are. Then we need to understand what they are, and to rest in them.

Then beginning in verse 4 Paul began to mention some of them, worshipping God for giving them to us.

I. THE FIRST BLESSING (Eph. 1:4).

The first as we have seen is that God has chosen us to be saved. He didn't do this after we were born; He did it "before the foundation of the world." This means before He created anything. As we study salvation in the Bible we come to understand that if God had not chosen us, and then after we were born, called us, and drew us to Himself, we would never have come to Him. Sin would do such damage to us that there never has been a person who would seek God "on his own."

And we see from the latter part of verse 4 what God's purpose was in choosing us and saving us. It was "that we should be holy and without blame before Him." We learn from John 3 and Romans 5 and many other passages in the Bible that the Lord did this because He loved us even when there was no reason in us as to why He should save us. And so it all had to be "by grace through faith" in Jesus Christ.

I hope that you love the doctrine of election in something of the same way that Paul did so that it will come at the top of your list when you think of reasons why you should worship and praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If it makes you mad, like it does a lot of people, it is just because you don't understand why it had to be that way. If God had not chosen me, I know I would be on my way to hell this morning. But it is because He intervened in my life that I can rejoice this morning that I am on my way to heaven. And I know that what I have said about myself,

many of you would say the same thing about yourselves. We could spend many Sundays talking about election, God's choice of us, but we will have to save that for another time.

Now this morning let us go on to what we can call

II. THE SECOND BLESSING (Eph. 1:5).

At least it is the second blessing that Paul mentioned here. We did not get the blessings of salvation one after another over a long period of time. We got the blessings Paul mentioned here in Ephesians 1 all at the same time.

Now you know that there were no chapters and verses in the original manuscripts of the Bible, and no punctuation. They were all added when, in our case, the Bible was translated into English. So I am going to suggest, as many Bible teachers have suggested before me, that the words "in love" at the end of verse 4 really belong at the beginning of verse 5. So verse 4 would end, giving God's purpose in saving us, "that we should be holy and without blame before Him." Period. And verse 5 then would begin, "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself," referring to God.

Now there must have been a council before there was any creation, where the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, laid out every detail of salvation. It must have been decided that the Father would choose those who were to be saved, the Lord Jesus would die for those whom the Father chose, and to the Holy Spirit was designated the work of convicting the elect, drawing them to Christ, and seeing to it that they were saved.

But somewhere in that divine council of the members of the Godhead it was decided that all who were saved would be brought into the family of God. In fact, they would be the family of God. Now think about that for a moment. He could have saved us without making us members of His family. But He planned to save us, not because we deserved to be saved, or even wanted to be saved. He saved us because He set His love upon us and wanted to save us. Now don't try to figure out why God didn't do something different. Just try to understand from Scripture what He did do!

Now it is unfortunate that the word "adoption" got into our English trans-

lations of the Bible because, and I want you all to listen now to what I am about to say. It is this: ***God has no adopted children!*** If I were to ask you Christians this morning, Do you believe that you are in the family of God? I would hope that you would say, “Yes.” And then if I asked you, How did you get into the family of God? I would hope that you would say, “I was born into God’s family.”

Recently I read to you what the Apostle John wrote about our salvation in the third chapter of his first epistle. I want to read it to you again this morning. He said,

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1-2).

Twice in these two verse in the KJV we read “the sons of God.” But actually the Apostle John used the Greek word for children, or even better, *the born ones of God*. No Christian has been adopted into God’s family. We were all born into His family. We all in this life received life from our parents. And being in the family of God means that you and I have received spiritual life from our heavenly Father. Let me say it again. God has no adopted children.

W. E. Vine, a very conservation Greek scholar, wrote in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Vol. 1, p. 32), “does not adopt believers as children; they are begotten [born] as such by His Holy Spirit through faith.”

J. Sidlow Baxter in his six-volume set on the whole Bible, called *Explore the Bible*, wrote in Vol. 6, p. 166, “The Greek word here rendered “adoption” does *not* (his emphasis) mean adoption in our modern Western sense.”

What then does it mean? It is used in five verses in the NT: in Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal. 4:5; and here in Eph. 1:5.

Please turn with me now to Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, and I want to begin reading to you from chapter 3, verse 22, down to chapter 4, verse 7. (Read and explain.)

It has always been true that those who are saved were born into the family of God. That was true of Noah. That was true of Abraham. That was true of Moses. That was true of David. That was true of Daniel. That was true of all OT saints. But Paul has said that being under the Law, they were like children under tutors and governors. But when faith came, or we could express that, when Christ came who was the fulfillment of the promises of salvation, the children of God were moved from the status of being children into a higher position of being sons. And it is this transition which took place in the family of God that is called “adoption.”

This past week as a part of the reading I have been doing, I read a part of John Owen’s work on *Communion with God*. He showed how utterly impossible it was, and still is, for people who don’t know the Lord to have fellowship with God. God is light; the unsaved are in darkness. God is life; the unsaved are dead in their sins. They are, as we are told in Ephesians, alienated from the life of God. They have no hope, and are without God in this world. John Owen said, “Our first relationship with God [he means the relationship that Adam and Eve had before they sinned] was so lost by sin that there was no possibility in ourselves of any return to God” (p. 2).

But then he said this, and his words are a good explanation of what the word “adoption” means in the Bible. He said,
Now the only way back into fellowship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ. And while Old Testament believers had communion with God through this means, they did not have a boldness and confidence in that communion. The way into the holiest was not yet open (Heb. 9:8). Under the New Testament, this way into the holiest has been opened and believers have boldness and confidence to come into God’s presence (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:20; Eph. 2:13, 14, 18). Christ, then, is the foundation of all our communion with God and by the Spirit believers now received boldness of faith. Consider how greatly God has honored us (p. 2).

All of this means that through the coming of Christ, through His death, resurrection, and ascension, we have an access to God and special blessings in salvation, such as not having to go to God through a priesthood. Every believer since Pentecost comes into the family of God as a son, not as a child like believers were under the Law. One evidence of this new relationship is that the Holy Spirit has been given to us to dwell in us

forever. Adoption does not have to do with spiritual growth. It has to do with our position in the family, and consequently an intimacy of our relationship with God, and with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. Going back under the Law would be like an adult son wanting to go back to live under tutors and governors.

The book of Ephesians could never have been written until after the coming of Christ in which He secured the salvation of all of the elect from the beginning of time until the end of time.

Concl: As I close, let me say a word to those of you in our church family who are adopted. Children who are adopted are not responsible for the position that they are in. Either you do not know who your real parents are, or for some reason they could not care for you. That is really a sad, sad state of affairs. But if you have somehow been placed in a home where Jesus Christ is loved, and where you have heard the Gospel, you need to see the good hand of God in your life, and turn to Him with all of your heart. He has shows special love for you by putting you where you are. And I hope you realize this, that if you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and trust Him as your Savior, you will become a true member of the family of God. God will be your heavenly Father. You will have His life in you, eternal life, and you will be in His family like the rest of us forever. Don't be angry with God because of what has happened to you here on earth. Thank Him for His goodness in placing you with a family where you are loved like you were there very own. But may this help you to see that in God's family you will not be adopted. By faith in Christ you will be born into God's family as a real and eternal child of the living God.