

Series on the Book of Ephesians  
Ephesians 1:4-6  
Sermon #3  
June 12, 1988

## THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD'S WILL L. Dwight Custis

Alright. Turn in your Bibles to the Book of Ephesians.

For those who are here for the first time or visiting with us this morning we are just getting started in the consideration of this very, very important epistle in the New Testament. My text this morning, I am not sure that I am going to get through all of these verses, is verses 4, 5, and 6 of chapter 1. You will notice that verse 4 has to do with the doctrine of election; verse 5 has to do with the doctrine of Sonship; and verse 6, the purpose of it all. Why don't you read these three verses with me: verses 4, 5, and 6. All together: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

We come today to consider the first of the spiritual blessings that we all have in Christ. We notice that that is the subject that Paul is getting into according to verse 3. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He does not mention all of them here. If he did the Epistle to the Ephesians would be much, much longer than it is. Let us remember that we are talking now about spiritual blessings. God gives us different blessings, does he not? Paul here is not concerned with our material blessings, yet we certainly have reason to be thankful for those: for our homes, for our clothing, for the food we eat, for the earthly possessions that we have. All of these are from God. The physical blessings he does not dwell on here: the health that we enjoy, the ability to think and the ability to speak and to hear and see and work. All of these are blessings that we are thankful for. But spiritual blessings are the subject. They are the most important of all blessings, I think, blessings that God has bestowed upon us in Christ. We can lose material blessings and we can lose physical blessings. Our health can change and our finances can change; but the spiritual blessings are blessings that we will never lose. If you read down the list you can see that Paul was not only talking about the doctrines that we will be looking into this morning. In verse 7 he mentions the redemption that we enjoy; also in verse 7, the forgiveness of our sins; you get down to verse 11 and he mentions our inheritance. You find that he speaks of what God is doing in our lives, bringing us to perfection. When we get to the thirteenth verse he speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have all of these, but these are not all that the Apostle Paul could have mentioned. They are ours because, and only because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If it were not for the Lord Jesus Christ we would not have any of these. It is interesting to know, when you think that Paul without any distinction between older believers or younger believers says that He has blessed us, all of us, with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. The person who, say, has been saved this morning has all of the blessings that the most mature Christian has. A newborn child of God will not know them as well, and perhaps not enjoy them as much, but nevertheless he has them. So we are talking about these blessings that we have because of our relationship to Christ. The Christian life, as I have said, does not consist in getting more from God; the Christian life consists in learning what we have in Christ and learning to appropriate these and enjoy them in our daily life. If you feel that you are deficient because others have things that you do not have by way of spiritual blessings, I hope that you will see that that is not the case. You have everything that everyone else has because you have Christ and all of these blessings are to be found in Him.

The doctrine of election is a doctrine which, unfortunately, has become a very controversial doctrine, not just in our day, but as you read back through church history you will see that this has really always been a controversial doctrine. I am concerned that we have the right attitude toward it and

that we approach this subject in the right way. So, before I deal specifically with this truth that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world and that this has to do with our salvation, I want to point out some things that we can see in this passage that perhaps will help us.

The first thing that is obvious, and this is all by way of just introducing this subject, Paul mentions this as one of the blessings in this passage in which he is devoting himself to the praise and worship of God. Obviously, there are a lot of problems connected with this doctrine: why God has chosen some and why God has not chosen everyone, and the sovereignty of God being exercised in salvation. Let us approach it this morning from the standpoint of praise and thanksgiving. Though there are problems and none of us can really solve all of those problems to our complete satisfaction, Paul is indicating here without any question that when you learn about the doctrine of election and you learn that your salvation is the result of a choice, a determination, that God made before the foundation of the world, your first response to that and my first response to that ought to be praise. If we approach it from that standpoint it is going to change our attitude, even as far as the problems are concerned. Paul is not approaching this as a controversial subject. He is approaching this as a spiritual blessing. As a spiritual blessing, he is offering praise and thanksgiving to God. That is one thing that I want you to note.

The second thing is the importance of this particular blessing is seen in the fact that he mentions it first. That ought to tell us something. Election comes first. I will be speaking, the Lord willing, more about that as we go on this morning, but that certainly should make us realize that this is a basic foundational truth. This is the starting ground of our understanding of salvation. This shifts salvation from merely a human emphasis and we are permitted to look at salvation from a divine standpoint.

Often when talk about evangelism and the preaching of the Gospel it is as though everything depends on us. I heard a radio evangelist saying just the other day, he was pleading for money and was saying that if we go off the air there are going to be thousands upon thousands of people who will never be saved. He obviously did not know anything about the purpose of God in salvation and he did not know that God's purposes cannot fail, that they are not dependent upon you and me, but they are the outworking of His sovereign will. So this is basic.

A third thing that I would like for you to notice is, as he mentions at the end of verse 5 after talking about election and sonship, that this is all according to the good pleasure of His will. If it is God's will then it has to be good and it has to be right, does it not? Although it might not be according to our thinking, and there may be things about it that we cannot fully comprehend, yet it is important for us to see that we are dealing with the will of God. I ask the question this morning, is there anything in the connection with the will of God that you can feel that you can answer to your own satisfaction and everybody else's satisfaction. There are problems connected with all teachings of Scripture. It is right that there should be because this is the Word of God. This is a revelation from God. We are coming to grips with these truths with our finite, limited understanding and we are dependent upon God to open our eyes and open our hearts and help us to understand these things. This is "according to the good pleasure of His will." This certainly ought to affect our thinking of this important doctrine.

Then, the last thing. We have this in the sixth verse. Of course, Paul touches upon this many, many times throughout his epistles. We see that God has chosen to work so that salvation would be "to the praise of the glory of his grace." This statement tells us two important things about salvation. One is that it is designed for His glory and the other is that it comes to us by grace so that it is not merited by any one of us who are the children of God. If I have the idea that God has saved me because He has seen something good in me, then I need to forget all about that. It is not because of any good in us. There is no good in us in the sight of God. He, in His sovereign will, for the fulfillment of His own purposes, has chosen His people; and in the course of time one by one He is drawing us to Himself.

As we come to the doctrine of election this morning I hope that you will see that this is the foundational truth of salvation. If we get this straight at the beginning we will get off to a good start in understanding the whole doctrine of salvation. In our day, especially, salvation has really become something that we feel that God has committed to us, we are to go out and win as many people as we possibly can, and the success of the Gospel is really dependent upon what we do. When you come to the Word of God, you do not get that picture at all. Paul was teaching here that before the foundation of the world, that is, before creation, before Adam and Eve were created, God sovereignly chose those whom He would save.

It was very necessary that God take an active role in the salvation of sinners. I say it was very necessary because of what sin has done to man. Sin has rendered all men slaves to their sin. Sin has made us rebels against God. Paul was telling the Ephesian saints, as one commentator has expressed it, "If God had not chosen them, they would never have chosen God." God's choice of certain sinners to be saved necessarily involved that He do everything necessary to see that purpose fulfilled. Since men will not seek God, God seeks those whom He has appointed for salvation. He convicts them of their sin. He draws them by His grace. He regenerates them and imparts to them even the ability to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, you remember, is the "Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). God did not make His choice, as we have seen by the reference to grace, on the basis of merit. He did not make His choice on the basis of His ability just to look ahead and see who would believe because no one would believe if it were not for the work of God in their hearts in drawing them to Christ. So evangelism is not simply a work in which we are trying to accomplish the work of God and hoping to win eventually the whole world to Christ, as some have expressed it; but evangelism is the work of preaching the Gospel, praying that God would use His Word as He sees fit to accomplish His purpose as to how and when and where and with whom His Word is going to be used. Long ago, as I have mentioned many, many times from this pulpit, Isaiah gave the people of God a very important promise and it is still true today when he said, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Our responsibility is to preach the Word. It is God's responsibility to use the Word as He sees fit. As this truth grips our hearts, I can guarantee you that we proclaim the Word with a greater burden and a greater tenderness and compassion towards sinners, beseeching them to come to Christ. But our hope is not on their willingness, or their ability to trust Christ. Our hope is that God is going to move upon their hearts and draw them to Himself. People who argue against election are arguing against the sovereignty of God in salvation. They are arguing against what the Word of God teaches about the total ruination of man because of sin. They are saying that one part of man that is free is His will, that he is free to turn to God at any time that he decides to turn to God. Instead of seeing that man has been hopelessly bound and depraved and blinded and set at enmity with God; and if it were not for the work of God, accompanying the preaching of the Gospel, evangelism would be the most hopeless thing that men could possibly try to accomplish. So here we see this wonderful statement of what God has done, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him."

People try to sidestep this doctrine in different ways. Some look at the language of this text . . . Remember that the blessings go down to verse 14. Starting with verse 3 he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed 'us' with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen 'us' in him . . . that 'we' should be holy and without blame before him . . . Having predestinated 'us' . . ." You go right down through those verses and you find that he is saying "us" and "we". When you get to verse 13 he says, "In whom 'ye' also trusted, after that 'ye' heard the word of truth . . ." So, in order to avoid this saying that the doctrine of election has to do with our salvation they say that this had to do with the apostles, but it is not until we get down to verse 13 that the Apostle Paul is including all of the people of God.

One major problem with that is: If we are going to say that election does not apply to us and that

Paul does not get down to us until he gets to verse 13, then that means that we have to give up every blessing that is mentioned from verse 4 down through verse 12. That means we have to give up redemption. That means we have to give up sonship. That means we have to give up the forgiveness of sins. That means we have to give up our inheritance. You can see how ridiculous that argument is because the Apostle Paul is certainly not saying that only the apostles are the sons of God, or only the apostles are redeemed, or only the apostles are forgiven, or only the apostles have an inheritance. He is obviously teaching this concerning all of the people of God. So if sonship and redemption and forgiveness and inheritance and all of these other blessings are our possession, so is it true that he said that he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. This applies to us just as much as it did to the apostles.

I am just showing you how some people have tried to do away with this. Others say that He has chosen us, but not chosen us for salvation. He has chosen us that we should be holy and without blame before Him in Love. That is what the verse says, isn't it?

One commentator made this statement, and I think it is very helpful. He said, "Many who imagine that they have explained away a difficulty by denying one phase of the doctrine have only achieved the fete of shifting that difficulty into another position." That is, if you try to explain away the doctrine of election by saying that He has chosen us to be holy and without blame, which is true, the question is "How is it possible for us to be holy and without blame and the verse still teaches that only those who are holy and blameless in the sight of God are those who are chosen before the foundation of the world?" You see, the truth is still there. Consequently, we need to realize that God's purpose in salvation is that we should be holy and blameless before Him, but this certainly does not do away in any sense of the word with the fact that we were chosen in Him for this very purpose, this ultimate goal of salvation before the foundation of the world.

In addition to this, we could also say that this, of course, is not the only passage in the New Testament that deals with the doctrine of election. I think the two verses which to me are the clearest and unanswerable as far as election having to do with salvation are those two verses that we find in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Listen to them. I would suggest that you memorize them if you have not done so. Here Paul says, "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is difficult for me to see how the Apostle Paul could have stated that any more clearly. So I say very emphatically to you, this morning, that we cannot deny the doctrine of salvation without denying a very, very vital part of the Word of God.

God, we know, had the right to do what He wanted to do about salvation. God would have been perfectly righteous if He had chosen just to leave all men in their sin, or He could have provided a salvation in which everybody would have been saved. But this is not what He has done.

Now, there are problems, as I have said, when we bring this to our way of thinking; but remember that God does not think the way we do. His thoughts and our thoughts are not the same. If you feel that you have figured God out completely, you perhaps have gotten a good distance away from the Word of God because His ways are different from our ways. Until we accept that, we are going to be inclined to reject any part of Scripture which really does not fit in with our thinking. There is a great deal that we find in the Word of God that you and I just simply cannot figure out. We accept it because it is the Word of God and we believe firmly that God has given us His truth. So I plead with you, dear Christian, do not reject this great truth. It is a truth which is the expression of God's good pleasure, a truth designed to meet the needs of sinners and to bring glory to God. Let us do what the Apostle Paul did. Let us fall before the Lord in adoration and praise that He has chosen us. Consequently, our hearts will be open to see the blessings that are ours in this wonderful truth.

You and I do not find people waiting at the doors of our churches wanting to be saved, do we? The

Lord has promised that anyone who desires to be saved is going to be saved, can be saved. I have no hesitation whatsoever in saying to you, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I believe with all my heart that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). But I know that when I find a person who is concerned about his soul, concerned about his relationship to God, who comes seeking the Lord--I know and you should know--that before that ever takes place in a person's life, God has been seeking that person. God has been working in that person's heart. When we praise God for our salvation, we do not thank Him we do not thank Him, do we, that we had the wisdom to figure all of this out? and, consequently, because of our great wisdom we saw that we were sinners and that Christ was the Saviour so we trusted Him? No. When we praise God for salvation, we praise Him just exactly the way the apostle did. He opened our eyes. He convicted us of our sin. He drew us to His Son. He is the One Who redeemed us by His mighty power. When we come to the Lord in prayer we do not take one bit of the credit to ourselves because we know in the depths of our heart that if God had not convicted us, if God had not drawn us, if God had not worked in our hearts, we would be just as lost as any person who is in the world today. We need to worship the Lord and thank Him that He savingly works in the hearts of those He has chosen, and salvation is the working out of His purposes according to His will.

Look at verses 11 and 12 of this important chapter. "In whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ." You see, in order to understand salvation, I have to start from God's point of view. Then I will be in a position to understand what is taking place in the area of the preaching of the Gospel and the working out of those purposes in daily life.

Now. I have four minutes to take up that other doctrine. Obviously, I am not going to do it this morning.

Let me conclude this morning by laying before you the importance of these words connected with election, "That we should be holy and without blame before him." Many feel, and I am inclined to feel, and I think I have mentioned this to you, that those two words "in love" really belong with verse 5: that, "in love he has predestinated us unto the adoption of children . . ." Just look at that expression: "He has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him." Paul uses that same expression over in the fifth chapter of Ephesians and the twenty-seventh verse where he is talking about the church. He says, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish." Identically the same words that he uses here in chapter 1 verse 4: We "should be holy and without blame before him in love."

Holy means saintly. Remember that he had addressed this letter in verse 1 to the saints which are at Ephesus. Saints are holy ones. To be holy is, of course, to be like God. When we went through the Epistle of Peter we you remember we saw where Peter quoted from the Book of Leviticus that the people of God were commanded to "be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16), "I the Lord thy God am holy." The purpose of redemption, and the reason behind God's choice of us in salvation, is that we should become like He is. This is the object of our salvation: "We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We are going to have a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. Romans chapter 8:29 says that we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." This is no new truth for many of you. But this is God's purpose in redemption--that we should be holy and without blame.

These two words evidently suggest, and this is the consensus of many who know these words from the original language, that what the Apostle Paul is saying here is that we are to be holy within and

we are to be without blame as far as our outward behaviour is concerned. Perhaps a better translation would be "faultless." The picture is intensified when, instead of saying that we should be holy and without blame before each other, he says that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that we would be holy inwardly and outwardly before Him, before God. I might be able to hide some things from you and maybe deceive my own heart; but, obvious, neither you nor I can hide anything from God. When we think of the purpose of redemption, this is a purpose that you and I could never accomplish, to make ourselves like God inwardly and outwardly. It is significant that he speaks here in this verse of that which is inward first, because only God can make that kind of a change. If I am not holy inwardly, I will never be without blame outwardly. Yet, you know, this is the way man is inclined to do. Man will work on the outward behaviour and it is commendable to do that sort of thing; but unless it is the expression of an inner change that God has made then my outward conformity to the Word of God is mere hypocrisy. Consequently, God has chosen us to make us saints, not just in name, but in character; and saintly in life. This process, this wonderful process of salvation is never going to be finished in this life. It is not going to be finished until we stand in His presence and we see Him. This process starts in the life of every child of God the moment he passes from death unto life. I am wary of the person, and you ought to be too, who claims to be a Christian but is not interested in holiness of life. I am concerned about the person who claims to be a child of God and yet can live his life the very same way that he used to live before he made that profession of faith. You see, God does a work in our hearts in response to His own choice before the foundation of the world when He comes into the hearts and lives of those whom He has chosen, people who are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He begins to work in them to make them holy within and faultless without. The day is going to come when that is going to be accomplished to a perfect degree. The purposes of election before the foundation of the world are finally going to be satisfied when before Him, before God Himself, God will declare that we are holy and without blame and we have reached the culmination of this wonderful salvation through our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How are you made holy? He is going to tell us in the Book of Ephesians. He is going to give us some wonderful instruction about how we become a holy people. I just present that to you, this morning, and trust that this truth will really delight your heart. If you have been inclined to just shove that aside, perhaps others have warned you that this is not the teaching of Scripture . . . One of our dear ladies said to me this week when Lucille and I were visiting with her and were talking about the service this morning and I told her that I was going to be talking about the doctrine of election. She said, "I just cannot see how anybody who believes the Bible can argue against the doctrine of election." It is there. Granted, we do not understand it all; but it is there. It is there for us to enjoy. It is there for us to praise. The reason that you and I can go out in this ungodly world where people are unconcerned about their relationship to God and preach the Gospel with the confidence that the Gospel is going to bring forth fruit in the salvation of sinners is not because we are going to be so effective in convincing them and breaking down their resistance; but, as the Word of God is preached, God is going to be using it in the hearts and lives of people to accomplish His wonderful purpose. There is no truth that I know of in the Word of God that is more encouraging in the whole ministry of evangelism than this great truth that God assures us that He has a chosen people. These people are going to be reached. These people must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They hear of the Lord Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel, and we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. His purposes are going to be accomplished.