

## Ephesians 1:5-6

### Introduction

“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, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.” That’s 38 words so far out of 202, and already both our minds and our hearts must feel like it’s too much – like we’ve been set adrift in a sea of divine love that doesn’t have any shores.

We know that in the Greek, this sentence goes on for 202 words without any pause for breath. But most\* of our English translations have a period at the end of verse 4, so that verse 5 begins a brand new sentence with its own main verb: “He predestined us...” Not only is there a period in verse 4, but there’s also one in verse 6, verse 8, verse 10, and verse 12. And almost every place there’s a period, the Greek has to be changed just a little to make it work (v. 10 is the lone exception). We’re going to change the translation back to the Greek again, so we can take all the periods back out.

I know that “run on” sentences are awkward, but they were also “awkward” in Paul’s day. They were no more grammatically acceptable then, than they are now. One person on the internet mentions the “‘proper’ usage of participles and relative clauses” as a justification for his “rant against the author of Ephesians 1:3-14.” Another person says that “this is the most monstrous sentence conglomeration that I have ever found in the Greek language” (Norden; quoted in O’Brien). Others have called the “bad grammar” of these verses an “apostolic disease” (cf. NET note 27 on Eph. 1:10). But they’ve entirely missed the point, haven’t they? Did they ever stop to ask themselves *why* this “disease” was so common to the apostles? Sadly, none of these men have been blessed with a vision of God in His Gospel that throws all our “rules” of grammar completely and totally out the window.

Paul was so overcome and overwhelmed with the splendor and beauty of God’s salvation that he couldn’t avoid a “run on” sentence of 202 words. If this is an “apostolic disease,” then by God’s grace may it infect us as well. If Paul no longer cares about grammar here in Ephesians one, then neither will we. And so what we’re going to end up with is not only a string of 202 words, but a string of clauses one after another, after another, after another, after another. Are you ready?

(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, (4) *even as* He chose us *in* Him *before* the foundation of the world, *that* we should be holy and blameless *before* Him *in* love, (5) *having* predestined us *for* adoption as sons *through* Jesus Christ *to* Himself, *according* to the good pleasure of His will, (6) *to* the praise of the glory of His grace, *which* He freely bestowed on us *in* the Beloved...”

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\* The KJV and NKJV stick closer to the Greek grammar and work harder to maintain the feeling of a “run-on” sentence.

That's only 65 words – not quite even a third of the way through. And what do you hear – a long, awkward, “monstrous” sentence, or the lavish riches of a salvation too wonderful to be contained by any of the rules of grammar?

Last week we saw that God... chose... us – before the foundation of the world. This *is* the spiritual blessing from which all other spiritual blessings flow. When God chose us, it was the supreme expression of His *love* – He was *fore-knowing* us. When God chose us, He was selecting us from out of a vast multitude of people – He was fore-knowing *only* us. When God chose us, it was in spite of us – when there was nothing in us to deserve, or even to invite His love. God's choice of us was before the foundation of the world. In other words, it was completely independent of anything at all in us – it was not based on anything at all in us. This is the freedom and the sovereignty of God's grace. This is a grace that knows no conditions whatsoever. This is the *meaning* of unconditional. This is the grace that *begins* and *therefore* also *will* bring to completion. Luther was right when he said that “God's will has no ‘Why’” (quoted in Bruce). The answer to all of our “why's” is found ultimately in the infinite, unfathomable depths of God Himself. It's into *this* wonderful truth that all of our faith is finally resolved, and all of our questions finally answered.

- ✓ Romans 11:33–36 — Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How *unsearchable* are his judgments and how *inscrutable* his ways! “For *who has known the mind of the Lord*, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

“He chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.” The goal and end of God's choosing us in Christ *before the foundation of the world* is our full perfection in Christ *on the day of the Lord Jesus*. We know that all of this is accomplished *in Him – in Christ*. Paul has already said this three times just in verses 3-4. But ‘*How?*’ is the question. Aren't we *all* asking that? How is it that God's choice of us actually becomes *effective* in Christ? Inquiring minds want to know.

- ✓ Psalm 111:2 (NASB) — Great are the [saving] works of the LORD; they are studied by all who delight in them.

How is it that this choice God made before the foundation of the world is actually accomplished and brought to pass within our own experience *today* – so as to actually make us holy and blameless before Him in love? Does it happen as if by magic, so that God just speaks the word and “zap!” we're holy? Not at all. The real answer is more than any one of us could have ever dared to imagine, much less put into words. But under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul will dare even to write it down on paper with pen and ink. He continues in verse 5:

### **I. “having predestined us”**

The first thing I want us to see may seem obvious, but it's something I don't think we can ever emphasize too much. Paul's talking about *us*. Whatever it may mean to be predestined, we know that *God predestined us*. He predestined *you*. He predestined *me*.

In verse 4 we saw that God chose us *before* (“*pro*”) the foundation of the world. So the idea there is that we were “pre-chosen.” But now in verse 5 Paul uses the word “*prooridzo*.” So those whom God *chose before* the foundation of the world, God also *destined* for something *before* the foundation of the world. Those whom God “pre-chose,” God also “pre-destined” (cf. Rom. 8:29). The emphasis of God’s pre-choosing is the *people whom* God has chosen (God chose *us*). The emphasis of God’s pre-destining is the *destiny* to which the chosen ones have been destined (God chose *our destiny*; cf. Hoehner). God determined and decided *our* destiny even before the foundations of the world were ever laid. So what is this destiny that God chose for us even before the foundation of the world? Paul answers:

## **II. “having predestined us for adoption as sons”**

Or we could say, “having predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters.” But sons and daughters of *whom*? You might say, “Well isn’t that obvious? Does it really need to be spelled out?” The ESV and the NIV both count on the fact that we’ll *assume* we’ve been predestined to adoption as God’s own sons and daughters. And maybe we would – but the fact is that Paul made no such assumption. Paul is careful to spell it out with five glorious, beautiful words – of which the ESV and the NIV only give us the first three.

## **III. “having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself”**

God predestined us to adoption as *His very own* sons and daughters (cf. NET; NRSV; NCV). We’ve been predestined to adoption as *sons* and *daughters* of *whom*? – Of GOD! Now it’s one thing for a human child to be adopted by human parents. There’s a certain logic and sensibility to that. Why not? The problem is when we assume (as we all too often do) that there’s a certain logic and sensibility to our own adoption as *sons* and *daughters* of *God*. But let’s even try to leave sin out of the picture. Even then, how in the world are we to conceive of *humans* being adopted by *God* – as His very own *sons* and *daughters*? There’s no earthly parallel for this. It’s another one of those spiritual blessings that takes place “in a dimension of existence... beyond common, everyday experience” – in the heavenly places (Thielman). A rich king adopting a poor pauper makes absolutely perfect sense. An incorruptible, immortal God adopting flesh and blood human beings to be His own sons and daughters seems in every way *impossible*. So how are we to make sense of this? What does it mean? How can we even comprehend it?

Notice in the long string of relative clauses in verses 5-6, the two references to Jesus: “having predestined us for adoption as sons *through Jesus Christ* to Himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which he graciously bestowed on us *in the Beloved*...” In all thirteen of Paul’s letters, there’s only *one* other place where Paul refers to Jesus as “beloved.”

- ✓ Colossians 1:13 — [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his *beloved Son*.

The only other New Testament author who refers to Jesus as “beloved” is Peter.

- ✓ 2 Peter 1:17 — [Jesus] received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my *beloved Son*, with whom I am well pleased.”

Peter’s thinking about that day when he was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Matthew also describes what happened.

- ✓ Matthew 17:5 — [Jesus] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my *beloved Son*, with whom I am well pleased.”

Before the Mount of Transfiguration, we also heard these words at the baptism of Jesus when He was coming up from the water.

- ✓ Matthew 3:17 — And behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my *beloved Son*, with whom I am well pleased.”

In a round about way, we also hear Jesus referring to Himself as God’s “beloved” when He was telling the people a parable:

- ✓ Luke 20:13 (cf. Mark 12:6) — Then the owner of the vineyard said, “What shall I do? I will send my *beloved son*; perhaps they will respect him.”

In every single one of these references, Jesus is God’s “*beloved SON*.” And now aside from an Old Testament quotation in Matthew 12:18, the *only* other reference to Jesus as “beloved” is right here in Ephesians 1:5. Twenty times in Ephesians Paul will use the phrase “*in* Christ Jesus,” “*in* Christ,” “*in* Him.” But *only* here does Paul break from the normal pattern and say instead, “in the *Beloved*” – only here, where he just happens to be unveiling that wonderful spiritual blessing in the heavenly places of *our own adoption as sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ*. So *this* is how we make sense of our adoption. *This* is how we begin to comprehend the idea that God predestined you and me to adoption as His very own *sons and daughters*.

From everlasting and all eternity past, God the Father has had a Son – His *one* and *only* Son. And the relationship between God the Father and God the Son is more intimate and loving than the most intimate and loving relationship we could ever imagine. Jesus prayed:

- ✓ John 17:5, 24 — *Father*, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you *before the world existed... Father... you loved me before the foundation of the world*.

But then, as Paul says in Galatians 4:4 – “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son [to be] born of a woman” (cf. John 5:23; 10:36; 1 John 4:9, 10, 14). Only twice during Jesus’ earthly ministry was God pleased to speak with an audible voice from heaven, and both of these times, these were the words He chose to speak: “This is my *beloved Son* with whom I am well-pleased.” In another place, Jesus said:

- ✓ John 5:20 — The *Father loves the Son* and shows him all that he himself is doing.

- ✓ John 10:17–18 — For this reason *the Father loves me*, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord [in willing obedience to my Father’s will]... This charge I have received from *my Father*.”

What is this relationship between the Father and the Son? It’s something utterly supernatural. It’s something that’s existed from all eternity. It’s something sacred and holy. It’s something beautiful and full of joy. It is “infinite *privilege*” on the one hand, and “perfect *likeness*” on the other. The author of Hebrews writes:

- ✓ Hebrews 1:2–3 — In these last days [God] has spoken to us *by his Son*, whom he appointed the *heir of all things* [infinite privilege]... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the *exact imprint of his nature* [perfect likeness].

What is this relationship between God the Father and the Son of His love? It staggers our minds just to think of it. It’s something we can only imagine ourselves *observing* as people standing on the *outside* wishing to look in. And yet here in Ephesians, Paul unveils the spiritual blessing in the heavenly places of *our own adoption* as God’s own sons and daughters *in the Beloved*. Through our adoption as God’s own sons and daughters, we’ve been made to share in the loving relationship that has existed for all eternity between the Father and the Son.<sup>†</sup> We aren’t just spectators standing on the outside and wishing to look in. We’ve been called up to share in the very life of the triune God as His own sons and daughters.

- ✓ John 17:22–23, 26 — 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*... 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.

And so as we share with the Son in the Father’s love, we are also called up to share in His own infinite *privilege* as heir of all things and His own perfect *likeness* to the Father in holiness and blamelessness.

- ✓ Galatians 4:4–7 — When the fullness of time had come, *God sent forth his Son*, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, *so that we might receive adoption as sons*. And because you are sons, *God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts*, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an *heir through God*.
- ✓ Romans 8:15–17 — You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but *you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons*, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that *we are children of God*, and if children, then *heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*.
- ✓ Romans 8:29 — For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be the firstborn among *many brothers*.

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<sup>†</sup> “The bounty which [God] lavishes on [us] ‘consists in [our] being caught up into the love which subsists between the Father and the Son’” (O’Brien; quoting Caird).

- ✓ 1 John 3:1–2 — See what kind of love the Father has given to us, *that we should be called children of God; and so we are*. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he [Jesus] appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is.

The miracle of our adoption by God is that we’ve even been made to share in the *likeness* of our Father because He’s even sent forth the Spirit of His one and only Son *into our hearts*. That’s a miracle for which there’s not even any remote parallel in any earthly adoption. Through our union with Christ, He shares *His* divine sonship *with us*. We call God “Abba Father” because *Jesus* spoke this way of *his* relationship with God. We are heirs of God because *Jesus* is God’s heir. *Christ’s* status as God’s Son lifts us up and makes us sons and daughters of God *with Him* (see Thielman). And that’s how we can be called sons and daughters of God. That’s why we can call *God*, our “*Father*.” Brothers and sisters, how can we *know* these things and not then strive with all of our hearts and minds to live holy and blameless before God in love? To the extent that we don’t, let us repent of our ingratitude and bless God not only with our words, but with our lives.

The word for “adoption” is never found in the Old Testament. The *idea* can be seen in God’s relationship to the nation of Israel:

- ✓ Hosea 11:1 (cf. Exod. 4:22; Rom. 9:4) — When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

But this “son” was actually a corporate nation. And this “son” was constantly prone to wickedness and rebellion (cf. Isa. 1:2). It was only with the coming of Christ that God’s predestining of *us* for adoption as His very own sons and daughters could be *fully* unveiled, and *fully* understood, and *fully* celebrated with all of our ransomed powers.

On the one hand, there is the *one and only Son* of God. His sonship is by *nature* and divine *right*. On the other hand, God is now bringing *many sons and daughters* to glory because of His purpose that Jesus should be the firstborn among *many brethren* (cf. Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:29). His sonship is by nature and divine right. Our sonship is by the free grace of adoption. So Paul writes:

**IV. having predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which he graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved...**

With all of these relative clauses, we’re meant to feel that wave, upon wave, upon wave is crashing over us. If we were destined for adoption as God’s very own sons and daughters before the foundation of the world, then this was completely independent of anything at all in us – it was not based on anything at all in us. So then, why were we predestined to something so glorious? Paul answers: God predestined us for adoption as His very own sons and daughters because this was the good pleasure of His will (cf. NASB; NKJV). Paul is talking about more than just the “purpose” of God’s will (ESV). This was what God *delighted* to do as the free and

*joyful* expression of His own unfathomable will (cf. O'Brien; Hoehner). I love how O'Brien says it: "[God] enjoys imparting his riches to many children'. Consequently, as men and women break out in praise, their pleasure in God is a response to his delight in doing good to them." (O'Brien; quoting Barth) What a wonderful, amazing, exhilarating picture!

If we were destined for adoption as God's very own sons and daughters before the foundation of the world, then this was completely independent of anything at all in us – it was not based on anything at all in us. So then, why were we predestined? Paul answers again: God predestined us for adoption as His very own sons and daughters to the praise of the glory of His grace. We can "clean it up" a bit by saying "to the praise of His glorious grace" (ESV; NIV; NRSV; HCSB). But I think we should leave it the way it is, "to the praise *of* the glory *of* His grace (NASB; NET; NKJV). Not only do we have the piling up of words and the piling up of clauses, we also have the piling up of what we know in grammar as genitive nouns and pronouns. We could even translate like this, "to the praise *of* the glory *of* the grace *of* Him"! What we can feel this doing is slowing things down and enabling us to meditate more fully on the grandeur and the majesty of the things Paul is speaking of (cf. Thielman). The goal of our adoption as sons and daughters is the praise of the glory of His grace.

Now in the ESV verse 6 ends like this: "with which He has *blessed* us in the beloved." But this is not the Greek word for "blessed." Instead, it's related to the word for grace. So we could translate "freely bestowed" (NASB; NRSV; NET), or "freely given" (NIV), or "poured out on us" (NLT). Or we could say with Bruce that we've been "begraced," or with Hoehner that "the believer has been ingratiated with grace." Or we could translate: "to the praise of the glory of His *grace*, with which He *graced* us in the Beloved" (cf. Hendriksen). Here we're meant to see not only the lavish abundance of the gift, but also the lavish generosity of the Giver (cf. O'Brien).

Sometimes we translate Ephesians 1 in order to help us avoid getting so "lost." But I wonder if that's really just missing the entire point. God delights for us to be lost in His love – or as Charles Wesley put it, to be "lost in wonder, love and praise." One commentator points out that the "heathen also at times ascribe praise and honor to their gods, but in their case the motivation is entirely different. They do it to appease them or to extract some favor from them" (Hendriksen). But for all of us who were predestined to adoption as God's very own sons and daughters, we know the simple, genuine, pure, passionate *delight* of adoring, and praising, and worshipping the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

*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,  
    *even as* He chose us  
    *in* Him  
    *before* the foundation of the world,  
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