

Building Biblical
COMMUNITY in CHRIST

What's So Great About Being A Christian? (2)
Ephesians 1:5-6

Introduction

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.
Ephesians 1:5-6

Did you ever notice what is in the middle of that word, "predestined?" It's the word "destiny." And the longer I live, the more I'm convinced that if someone has a sense of destiny, they can make it through just about anything.

This passage has ministered to me personally in recent days as I continue to work through the grieving process of losing my Mom and oldest boy. I was reminded the other day of Elizabeth Elliot's words after the tragic murder of her husband who was trying to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador with the gospel. (By the way, we celebrate this next year the 50th anniversary of his death). She says this:

"...your solution to grief is just another way of giving the same answer that God gave me in the first empty days - *accept this*. Only in acceptance lies peace - not in forgetting, nor in resignation, nor in busyness. His will is good and acceptable and perfect."

Is there an area of your life – loss, suffering, difficulty – where God is saying this to you? The opposite of acceptance and trust in God's wisdom is control. *But we give up control when we know God is in control*. And this is where the doctrine of predestination comes in. When you let this teaching sink deep into your being, you'll be able to relax and give up the control of your life and circumstances.

Before looking more specifically at this word "predestined," we need to clarify whom Paul is speaking of. Who is the "us" in this verse? And the answer is that the "us" are those who are "in Christ." What does it mean to

be *in* Christ? We'll come back to that expression again and again as it is so key to understanding this letter (cf. verse 6b "in the One he loves"). But for now, get this: *We will never be all we were meant to be until we truly know that we are no longer who we used to be.* Our growth in Christ begins right here, with a new understanding of who we are "in Christ."

Last year I transplanted some lavender from one part of the yard to another. Not only did we prefer the new location for aesthetic purposes, but the soil and exposure to the sun was preferable. Essentially we moved the plant from one soil and climate to another, which has enhanced the growth of the plant. When one is "in Christ," they have been "transplanted into a new soil and a new climate, and both soil and climate are Christ."¹ This is also the image that Paul uses in Romans 6. He says that *"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."* In fact, the term "united with him" was used in the first century of trees planted together in the same bed and which *grow* together as one. So those in Christ have been transplanted into a new soil and a new climate, and both soil and climate are Christ

The great church father and theologian Augustine was in Milan, Italy when his life was changed; God touched his heart. He left his former immoral life, after having an illegitimate son. When he returned home, his former girlfriend called out to him: "Augustine, Augustine, it is I" she said. He turned and replied: "Yes, but it is not I." Augustine had been transplanted into a new soil and a new climate, and that new soil and climate is Christ. And so have you.

One other word before we look at our verses for this morning. For some of you, these messages may seem difficult or hard to understand. It's true that we are dealing here with some of the more difficult truths of the Bible. But I want to remind us of something. Paul was writing to ordinary people like you and me. He wasn't writing this to theologians or philosophers, but to farmers and artisans and carpenters. We need to keep this in mind. If they could understand these truths, with the help of the Holy Spirit, so can you and I.

I. He has predestined us.

In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ...Ephesians 1:4b,5

A. What is predestination?

This word "predestine" is used only six times in the New Testament, though it isn't always translated "predestinate."ⁱⁱ The English term translates the Greek *proorizo*, *pro* meaning "beforehand" and *orizo* meaning "to mark out." The Greek work looks and sounds like our word "horizon," that line that *marks out before* us the separation of the land and the sky. The English word carries the same two meanings: "pre" ... "destinate," i.e. to "destine beforehand." The word simply means then that God has a plan for you and me, i.e. a destiny marked out beforehand. And it assures us that we are going to make it! But it always focuses on our future destiny as believers rather than who will or will not become believers.

The two passages where the term is used in reference to believers are Romans 8 and Ephesians 1. Here's what Paul says in Romans 8:29-30:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Rom 8:29

First, notice that predestination in this verse speaks of believers, those whom "God foreknew." Last week we illustrated just what this means. God "knew us before hand" us in the sense that he saw us as being "in Christ." Once "in Christ," God determines our destiny which is, in this verse, to be conformed to the image of his Son. In other words, this doctrine of predestination simply teaches that those who are *in* Jesus Christ are one day going to *be like* Jesus Christ. Predestination, as election, is always *for* something. And that "something" is not *to become* Christians, but *as* Christians to be like Christ and to receive an inheritance.

B. What are the benefits of predestination?

Just what are the practical implications of this doctrine for you and me today?

First, God will finish what He has begun. Paul, in Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began this good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." No doubt about it, if you are in Christ, you will finally one day be made like him.

Second, this truth of predestination should give us great encouragement in our trials and difficulties. In fact, that is exactly the application of the teaching that Paul calls our attention to in Romans 8:28 – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.” No matter what we face in this crazy, sinful world - be it sickness, death, loss, or pain - we have the assurance that God will accomplish in us that which He has promised.

Finally, we as Christians will never be lost. Because God has predestined us to be made like Christ, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. That's what Paul says in Romans 8:38-39 -

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In fact, back in verse 30 it says that 'those he justified he also glorified' (past tense!). Your destiny is so sure that God can speak of it in the past tense!

This past Wednesday my daughter, Mary Lynne, and I boarded a plane bound for Cincinnati. Sean Hulin, here on the front row, was also on that same plane. The destination of the plane had been determined by the proper authorities. Nothing, apart from terrorists, mechanical difficulty, or weather) could change that. This is at least a very faint picture of predestination. The destination of the plane had been determined beforehand. Once on board, there were scores of passengers, all sitting in different seats. For the most part, they were free to move about the cabin...go to the bathroom, read, talk, stretch, or sleep. But all the while, that airbus was carrying us on toward a predetermined destination.

The big difference is that God's purpose *never* fails. Both Sean and I missed our connecting flights by minutes. That will never happen with God. His predetermined purpose to make you and me like His Son will never fail and will never be off schedule.

II. He has adopted us.

Notice, not only are we predestined, but we are predestined with a specific

purpose in mind: to be adopted. This concept occurs only five times in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5-7). You have the verses on your notes and I would encourage you to study in detail these passages.

...he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— Ephesians 1:5

A. What is adoption?

Adoption in the NT sense does *not* mean what it does today. When we think of adoption, we refer to someone who is outside the natural blood ties of a family, but is now legally placed within that family. But in the New Testament, the word speaks of the placing of a newborn child (i.e. one already born into the family) into a position of privilege and responsibility.

We are not placed into the family of God by adoption. We are placed into God's family by spiritual rebirth. We become his children at the point of conversion. In the Bible, this is called "regeneration" (Titus 3:5) or being "born again" (John 4). But by adoption, we are placed into the position of adult children. We were *born* into the family of God at the moment of our spiritual rebirth. But then, as children of God, we are also *adopted* as sons.

So what is "adoption" in the biblical sense of the term? It is the act of God by which he gives to each of his children an adult standing in His family.

B. What are the privileges of being God's adopted children?

But just what are these privileges of having an adult standing in God's family? In Romans 8, Paul concisely lists several of these privileges.

1. Freedom

So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family. Romans 8:15 NLT

I've had the joy of seeing two of my children move into that "adult standing" and a third one who is on the verge of it. When they were younger, they heard far more frequently, "Do this, don't do that; don't go there; don't touch this." But as they grow older,

certain previous restrictions are set aside, giving the adult child greater responsibility but at the same time greater freedom and more privileges.

In the Christian life, on the other hand, we enter into the full privileges of full grown children the moment we enter God's family. But a lot of Christians don't live like that. They live like "cowering, fearful slaves" under the bondage of legalism. "Do this, don't do that; don't go there; don't touch this." It's because they have never come to realize the freedom they have as adopted children in God's family.

2. **Intimacy**

"You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family – calling him 'Father, dear Father.' Romans 8:15b NLT

For those who are parents here this morning, I have a question. Did your children speak the moment they were born? Of course not. They cried. They slept. They messed in their diapers. But they didn't talk. They had to learn to do that.

But when we are adopted as full grown children into God's family, we can talk *immediately* with our Father and experience all the intimacy that comes with that. And we call him "Abba, Father," literally "Daddy, Daddy." I always like it when my children refer to me that way. It speaks of intimacy and trust between a father and his children.

3. **Assurance**

For the Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God's children. Romans 8:16 NLT

Think about it – a newborn baby doesn't know what his name is, what family he belongs to, what his parents are called, or the names of his siblings. I don't know about you, but when I was born, I didn't even know that I was a human being. I had to grow

into that knowledge.

But because we are adopted into God's family as the moment of our new birth, we know immediately that we are God's children. We know immediately that we have brothers and sisters in Christ. And we can immediately call God "Daddy."

4. **Suffering**

"But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering." Romans 8:17 NIV

Admittedly, we all want the product without the process. The product is to share in his glory. But the process is to share in his suffering. But we don't like that; it doesn't feel good. And yet this is one of the great privileges of being an adult child of God. Paul reminds us: "For it has been granted to you, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

One of the reasons you and I don't respond well to suffering is because we're asking the wrong questions. Don't ask the question "why?" (God, why me? Oh God, why is this happening?). When you ask that, you "waste" your sorrows. But don't waste your sorrows. Ask rather the question "what?" ...what do I have to learn?

Annie Lawrie is one who has been asking the "what" question. And I've asked her to share with us what she has been learning.

TESTIMONY: Annie Lawrie

The Return of Hope

I'm standing here because I wrote Pastor David a note saying how much the Epistle to the Ephesians had helped me this year. So, be careful what you write to him- you might be next!

As most of you know, my husband of 42 years has recently gone home to be with the Lord. What many of you may not know is that he

was first diagnosed with a rare blood disease in which the body makes too many proteins in 1990.

Several times we thought the end had come as Jim went through many sessions of chemotherapy. He also had insulin-dependent diabetes as a result of his treatments. However, he always rallied, and we were so thankful for that. About a year ago, he seemed to be really declining, both physically & mentally. Finally, a MRI taken this last fall showed he had developed water on the brain. But, we were encouraged when Jim's neurologist said that a shunt could be installed to drain the water off into the stomach, and this was quite a common procedure. Jim was eager to have this done. At last surgery was scheduled for Dec. 3rd, and Jim was doing really well with the shunt for about a week. All the family was filled with hope that Jim would rally again. This was not to be, however. The evening of Dec. 12th, Jim began to shake violently and had to be taken into emergency. The shunt had become infected, causing meningitis, and the shunt had to be removed. Jim's body, weakened by years of chemo & diabetes, fought against the infection, but could not overcome it. All our hopes for recovery were dashed.

It was at this time that Pastor David announced we were going to study the Epistle to the Ephesians, and challenged us to read through it once a day for a week-, which I did. As I read about all the great, eternal benefits we have in Christ, I was reminded to take my mind off my earthly circumstances and instead focus on all that I have now in Christ, and all that is laid up for my husband & myself when we reach our heavenly home. It lifted my spirits just to read through the many benefits we have in Christ, and to realize that I have everything to look forward to!

As I read through the first three chapters of the epistle, these are the things I found: Every spiritual blessing is mine. I am chosen and adopted in Christ. Grace has been lavished on me to the extent that I have been saved by grace, through faith, and not by my own efforts. I am redeemed, my sins forgiven, and I am sealed with the Holy Spirit. I have a guaranteed and glorious inheritance. I've been given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. As part of the body of Christ, His great power is available to me. I am raised with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies. I've been created to do good works,

which God has prepared in advance for me to do. I am included in the covenant, so I've been brought near to God with full access to the Father. I am a citizen of God's household. I am God's dwelling place, a part of his family. His love for me surpasses knowledge, and He is able to do beyond all that I could ask or think! And these same benefits are available to every one of us who is in Christ!

As I reflected on these great truths, I saw that this was a permanent hope that nothing- no unpleasant circumstance, disease or tragedy could take away. My challenge now, is to keep that focus & perspective. But, I know when I get down (and I do at times) I can pick up the Epistle to the Ephesians anytime to remind myself of all I have now and all I have to look forward to!

5. **Inheritance**

And since we are his children, we will share his treasures – for everything God gives to his Son, Christ, is ours too. Romans 8:17 NLT

No baby can directly inherit his parents' wealth. Even if you want to open a savings account for a baby at the bank, you have to go through an enormous amount of red tape. You'll have to name a trustee to make the transactions. The baby will also have to have a social security number, even though she has never worked.

But when you and I were born into God's family, we were not simply given new birth, we were adopted as full-grown children with all the inherent rights and privileges that that entails. We don't have to wait and mature in order to begin to experience our great inheritance in Christ.

Even so, this adoption is not fully realized until the future. Paul says in Romans 8 –

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:23-24

When you and I know what we have been destined for, we can make it

through just about anything. We have been blessed. We have been chosen. That is our *identity*. But we also have been predestined. We have been adopted as full-grown children in God's family. And that is our *destiny*. And when you and I understand our identity and our destiny, we will experience a security in life that we have never known before.

Notes

ⁱ J.S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* cited by Charles Caldwell Ryrie *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p 50.

ⁱⁱ Four times it speaks of the predestination of the church (Rom 8:29, 30; Eph. 1:5,11). Beyond this, it refers to God delivering up Christ to death (Acts 4:28; cf. 2:23) and once it refers to God's wisdom destined for our glory (1 Cor. 2:7).