

Our Salvation: The Father Planned It

Ephesians 1:3-6

Welcome back to Ephesians, The Grand Canyon Of Scripture! As we continue our tour, we immediately notice so many blessings given to us by our Heavenly Father! The old hymn tells us to count our many blessings, but once we actually begin to do that, we discover that we simply cannot—there are far too many of them. Because we are physical beings, so much of the time when we think of our blessings, we think of things such as family, friends, health, possessions, etc. And those are definitely blessings from God.

But we are also spiritual beings. And God has blessed us in that realm as well, which is one of the major themes of Ephesians. So in 1:3 we read these amazing words: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* Notice a couple of things about these spiritual blessings before we move any further.

First, these blessings are **personal**. God has blessed “us” in the heavenly realms—not just the ancient Hebrews, or the early Christians, or the super Christians of today. He has blessed **us**, and even in our day, we are included in that. These blessings are personal.

Second, these blessings are **complete**. This verse says that we have been blessed in the heavenly realms with *“every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* That means that nothing has been overlooked or left out. No budget cuts here! In Christ, God the Father has given us every blessing that there could possibly be—without exception. We really cannot even describe all of them.

Paul had the same problem when he tried to inventory for us the blessings which are ours in the spiritual realm. Everything Paul has to say in this letter is related in some way to verse three. In fact, he elaborates a little in the next few verses by telling us some of what those blessings are.

In just a few verses Paul says that we have been **chosen, loved, adopted, redeemed** and **forgiven**. Take a closer look:

Verse four says that *“he chose us in him before the creation of the world,”* and that He has done this *“in love.”* Verse five is where we learn that we have been *“adopted.”* We see in verse seven that we have *“redemption”* from our sins, and

as a result, we have been forgiven. And there are many more. Paul is so exuberant in detailing these blessings for us that he almost forgets to stop long enough to take a breath. In the original language, verses three through 14 are one long, continuous sentence, which begins and ends with praise. It's the longest sentence in the Bible, though it's been broken down into several sentences in English.

Look at verse three again: "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Then look at the end of verse 14: "*...to the praise of his glory.*" In between Paul inventories for us just some of the blessings which have been lavished upon us by our Heavenly Father. So verse three serves as a kind of summary of this entire passage. It works like this: in verse three we read that God the Father "*has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*" Then Paul begins to list exactly what those blessings are as we begin our tour of Ephesians. They all have to do with the blessings God has given us, all of them included as a part of our salvation.

From where we are standing we can look forward toward verse fourteen, and there are three things that we need to highlight about our salvation. First, we see in verses 3-6 that ***God the Father has planned our salvation.*** Second, in verses 7-12, we'll learn that ***God the Son has paid for our salvation,*** and third, in verses 13-14 we'll realize that ***God the Holy Spirit has sealed our salvation.*** We'll stop and look more closely as we walk past them.

But first, we pause today to look at 1:3-6, where we see that God the Father has planned our salvation. In fact, the astounding truth that leaps out at us from the page is that from the beginning of time, God had a plan to provide salvation for us, so that we could be with Him forever. It is absolutely foolish for anyone to believe or even think for a moment that the God Who is responsible for all of creation would not have an intricately detailed blueprint for what it was going to look like, who would occupy it, and how long it would last. He has not just stood idly by, watching to see how it would play out by itself. No, there is way too much love and care invested in this to let it go that way.

Several years ago in *Christianity Today*, Cheryl Waltermann Stewart wrote that her mother's father worked as a carpenter near Chicago. One day, he was building some crates for the clothes his church was sending to a mission orphanage in China. On his way home, he reached into his shirt pocket for his brand new glasses, but they weren't there. As he mentally replayed what might have happened to them, he realized that the glasses had slipped out of his pocket unnoticed and

fallen into one of the crates, which he had nailed shut. At that moment, his brand new glasses were on the way to China!

This was in the middle of The Great Depression, and with six children, he had no money to replace that pair of glasses. On his way home he told God, "It's not fair. I've been very faithful in giving my time and money to your work, and now this."

Several months later, the missionary from the same orphanage was on furlough in the United States. He wanted to visit all the churches that supported him in China, so he came to speak one Sunday at the carpenter's small church in Chicago. The missionary began by thanking the people for their faithfulness in supporting the orphanage. "But most of all," he said, "I must thank you for the glasses you sent last year. You see, the Communists had just swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my glasses. I was desperate. Even if I had the money, there was simply no way possible to replace my glasses. Along with not being able to see well, I experienced headaches every day, so my co-workers and I were much in prayer about this. Then your crates arrived. When my staff removed the covers, they found a pair of glasses lying on top."

The missionary paused long enough to let his words sink in. Then, still gripped with the wonder of it all, he continued: "Folks, when I tried on the glasses, it was as though they had been custom-made just for me! I want to thank you for being a part of that miracle."

The people listened, happy for the missionary's glasses. But he surely must have confused their church with another, they thought. There were no glasses on their list of items to be sent overseas. But sitting quietly in the back, with tears streaming down his face, an ordinary carpenter realized the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way.

That's a great story! But if God cared enough to provide glasses for a missionary in China, surely He cares enough to have provided eternal salvation for each of us from before the creation of the world. He had a plan! But it doesn't matter how good or amazing a plan is, if there is not also a course of action, then the plan is for nothing. Here's the good news: God not had only a plan, but He also had a strategy for carrying it out. This passage we're looking at today gives us just a glimpse into that strategy.

1 He chose us, 1:4-5

This is what we find in verse four: “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*” Almighty God, Creator, The Great God above all gods, the One Who has no equal—this God *chose us!*

Know this: before He ever said “Let there be light”; before there was evening and morning; before there was a moon and a sun; before any plants sprung from the dirt; before any creatures walked the earth; before Adam and Eve were fashioned from the dust of the ground; before He ever said “It is good,” the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose *you* to be “*holy and blameless in his sight.*” Before your DNA came together to form the cells of your body; before you cried your first cry; before sunlight ever hit your eyes; before you took your first step or spoke your first word; before you made your first decision or made your first mistake; before you committed your first sin—God chose you to be His. You were not an accident. You were not an afterthought.

That is an amazing thought, but there’s one word in verse five that confuses a lot of people. So since we’re standing right next to it, let’s pick it up and look at it. The verse reads, “*In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons....*” Some people look at that word *predestined* and assume that it means that God chose some to go to heaven, and some to go to hell. God must be a terrible God if He has already decided who is going to hell or heaven. If that is true, they reason, then there is nothing any of us can do about it, so we might as well live the way we want to.

But an interpretation like that is contrary to everything else—literally everything else—that we read in Scripture about our God. This word has nothing to do with that vague idea of “fate.” A little word study will help us here, I think. The word that is translated “predestined” means “to choose beforehand.” It also means “to mark out the boundaries ahead of time.”

Think about it this way: suppose I need to fly to Dallas, Texas, and I purchase my ticket ahead of time. When the day arrives for my flight, I step up to the counter and present my ticket that I have bought ahead of time. It has been predestined, or predetermined, that this particular flight will go from Jackson, Mississippi, to Dallas, Texas, on that particular day. So in keeping with the proper translation of this word in Ephesians 1:5, only those who have bought tickets and who walk on board that plane at the proper time, will go to Dallas, Texas. It has been predestined that the plane is going to Dallas, and those who want to go to Dallas

have to make a decision to purchase a ticket. Those who don't buy tickets or who don't get on the plane, will not be going to Dallas. Those are the boundaries.

In the same way, it has been predestined that those who choose to follow Christ with all their lives will be the ones who go to heaven. It has also been predetermined that those who do not follow Christ will not be going to heaven.

Or here is another way to look at it. Drive down any highway and you will see signs posted which tell us what the speed limit is for that section of that highway. That has been predetermined before we ever got into our vehicles. It has also been predetermined that whoever exceeds that speed limit will be subject to receiving a pretty hefty fine if they are caught. So when I get into my car, I can choose whether or not I am going to obey the speed limit. Those are the boundaries within which I must operate my vehicle. Those who disobey the predetermined rules are punished.

So with that understood, look at it once more. God has marked out the boundary ahead of time as to who will qualify. That is what He has predestined. God has chosen us, but who actually enters heaven is left up to each individual. If I choose to be within the boundary by surrendering to Christ, then I go to heaven. And God made that arrangement before the earth was even formed, by choosing that those who follow Christ will be the ones who receive salvation.

2 He adopted us, 1:5

Verse five continues, *“He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”* Here: pick up that little word “adopted” and look at it. Pass it around. You’ll be amazed at what you see!

The Bible uses many metaphors for salvation, including that of being “born again.” But the concept is so rich that no one word or phrase can completely describe what God has done for us. This word “adoption” is a very deliberate word to describe what God has done for us in Christ in this blessing of salvation. Because of our sin, we are not naturally members of God’s Family. So adoption is the legal process by which we are made members of that Family, where we do not rightfully belong.

But it gets better. Remember that Paul and his first readers were living under Roman rule. Under Roman law, an adopted son had all the rights and privileges of a natural-born child. But it was much more than just moving into the same

household. The adopted child took on the name and even shared in the possessions and inheritance. In the eyes of the law the adopted son was a brand new person. Even all of his debts and obligations that were connected with his previous family were completely wiped clean as if they had never been!

This is what Christ has done for us. Do you see that now? The Bible Itself says that we have been adopted—and all our sins, all our mistakes, all our bad choices and bad associations—have been eradicated from our lives as if they had never existed! And we have been granted all the rights and privileges of our Father. God our Father carried out His plan by making that a part of our blessing of salvation.

3 He “graced” us, 1:6

The method God used to work all this in our lives was something the world had never really seen before. We see it in verse six: *“to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”*

We’ve already seen that the word translated “grace” (*charis*) was used to describe a kindness that one did for a friend. But then Jesus came along, and instead of meaning a kindness you do for a friend, it now means something else entirely. It means that kindness is shown even to enemies, to those who least deserve it. The Bible makes it clear that because of sin we are the enemies of God, but He has shown us a kindness we did *not* deserve. That’s what grace is.

In our day we might say that someone “graced” us with her presence. But when we say that God “graced” us, we are referring to the action of God bestowing grace on us. Everything we have—all the earthly blessings as well as the spiritual ones—have been given to us as a gift from God—and that is grace. We have done nothing, and could do nothing, to earn this kindness from God.

So we’ve seen that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ planned our salvation from before the foundation of the world, and He had a definite strategy for carrying out that plan. He chose us, picked us out, then adopted us and made us His by pouring His grace upon us, granting us something we could never earn or deserve.

Sound too good to be true? It is good, and it is true. But here’s the catch. It doesn’t happen automatically, not for any of us. You are not automatically going to heaven just because you die, or just because you are a good person. You’re not even going to heaven based on your lengthy church membership, or how well others liked you.

This salvation which was planned for you before the world was created is something that must be agreed upon by you. You cannot be adopted into His family unless you agree to it. It's all part of His grace that He is pouring out on each of us.

But will you accept this grace? Like purchasing your plane ticket ahead of time, you must decide while you are still living here that you are going to accept this offer, this wonderful gift of salvation. Every second that ticks by is another second you've lost to make this right between you and your Heavenly Father.

God planned a way for you and me to be able to have salvation and enter heaven, in spite of our sins, long before the world was even spoken into existence. God has chosen you! But only those who meet the conditions God has set forth in His Word will be blessed enough to actually receive salvation.

Are you ready for that today?