

The Sovereign work of God

Ephesians 1: 3-6

As we continue to move through the first chapter of the Ephesian letter, we come to one of the greatest doctrinal passages in all of Scripture. It is interesting to note, in the original Greek, verses three through fourteen are one continual sentence. In this passage, Paul deals with the great spiritual depths of salvation by grace, according to the divine plan of God.

John MacArthur reflects that the passage can be broken up into three sections. We discover the past aspect of God's plan for salvation in verses three through six. Verses six through eleven deal with the present aspect of our salvation; and verses twelve through fourteen focus on the future aspect of salvation. One is biblically correct in stating that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved.

MacArthur also presents a three-fold division that focuses on the triune Godhead. The opening section deals with the Father's work in salvation; the center section focuses on the Son's provision in salvation; and the final section reveals the Spirit's work regarding our salvation. This is the approach that we will take as we examine this gracious and powerful passage. As we discuss the varied [facets](#) of the Father's work in salvation, I want to consider: [The Sovereign work of God](#).

I. The Supremacy Involved (3) – [Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ](#). Paul spoke of:

A. The Source – [Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ](#). While we are unable to properly comprehend the triune God, existing in three distinct persons, and yet being one God, this passage reveals the individual and specific work of each person of the Godhead. It is apparent that the plan of salvation originated with God the Father. As we will discuss later, the Son offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sin, and the Spirit draws us to the Lord, preserving and sealing us in salvation. However, we cannot overlook the goodness and grace of the Father in regard to our salvation. He has blessed us abundantly, choosing us for Himself, and adopted us into His family. Such a God is worthy of our praise and devotion. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

B. The Substance – [who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings](#). I will readily admit, such a promise is more than I can grasp. Paul declares the Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings. Such blessings are too numerous to count, and reach to heights that we cannot possibly understand. Every blessing we enjoy in this life and throughout eternity are gifts from the

gracious hand of our Father! Psalm 139:17-18 – How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! ^[18] If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.

C. The Setting – who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. What an encouraging promise. The spiritual blessings provided by the Father are seated in heavenly places in Christ our Lord. This aspect of the promise is also too vast to comprehend. This abundance of blessing is backed by all heaven affords. The blessings of the Father originate in heaven through Christ the Son.

- While we clearly enjoy material and physical blessings in this life, the believers' blessing is not limited to this life alone. The abundance of God will continue beyond the grave. Even now, as we walk with the Lord in a physical body, we enjoy blessings of immeasurable abundance and variety. He daily meets our needs, but we also enjoy the spiritual blessings from heaven. I would argue the spiritual blessings far outweigh the material blessings.

II. The Selection Involved (4) – 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. Here Paul discussed the gracious selection of the saved by grace. Consider:

A. A Sovereign Person – According as he hath chosen us in him. Isn't that an overwhelming thought? God the Father has chosen us unto Himself. I stand amazed at His love and provision for sinful, depraved human beings like myself. The Father genuinely loves us, making provision for us, choosing us as the objects of His grace, and desires us to be part of His eternal family! *Why did He love me? I never can tell; Why did He suffer to save me from Hell? Nothing but infinite grace from above, Could have conceived such a story of love.* (G. R. Harding)ⁱ

B. An Eternal Plan – According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. Paul declared the redeemed by grace were chosen according to the sovereign plan of God before the foundation of the world. Again, isn't such a thought so amazing that it is beyond comprehension? Long before the Father ever spoke creation into existence, His love was evident for us according to His divine plan. Knowing Adam would fall in sin, resulting in all humanity being sinful and condemned, he created Adam anyway. Even more miraculous is the fact that the Father knew His only begotten Son would die as the substitutionary atonement for our sin. God knew all of this, and yet His love and grace compelled Him to create mankind, choosing the redeemed unto Himself before He ever formed this world and humanity. That is nothing short of grace!

C. A Gracious Purpose (4b) – [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.](#) One cannot consider this statement and miss God’s gracious desire to fellowship with His creation. I am well aware that God desires and deserves our worship, but He also desires fellowship with us. In order for such fellowship to be possible, we have to be righteous as He is righteous. There was an insurmountable problem however – we are sinful, depraved, and unrighteous. We had no means of obtaining the righteousness required to fellowship with God and enter His holy presence.

- Through Christ, God made a way that sinful humanity could be redeemed by His grace, being transformed for our sin and guilt, being justified and without blame in Christ. God desired we be holy and without blame before Him. He provided the solution for our sin through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross to redeem us.

III. The Security Involved (5-6) – [Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ^{\[6\]}To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.](#) Here we discover the secure position enjoyed by the redeemed by grace. Consider:

A. The Gathering – [Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.](#)

The redeemed are predestined to adoption as the children of God by Jesus Christ the Lord. God had previously appointed, He foreordained and predetermined our adoption into His family through Jesus Christ our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord. This reveals the abundance of God’s grace and flows naturally from Paul’s previous comments. Long before mankind was formed of the dust of the earth, the Father had foreordained a plan to redeem the fallen unto Himself. In His wisdom and gracious provision, God made a way for the sinful to be reconciled to Himself and enjoy being adopted into His family.

- *In the ancient world the family was based on a Roman law called “patria potestas,” the father’s power. The law gave the father absolute authority over his children so long as the father lived. He could work, enslave, sell, and if he wished, he could pronounce the death penalty. Regardless of the child’s adult age, the father held all power over personal and property rights.*

Therefore, adoption was a serious matter. Yet, it was a common practice to ensure that a family would not become extinct by having no male children. And when a child was adopted, three legal steps were taken.

1. *The adopted son was adopted permanently. He could not be adopted today and disinherited tomorrow. He became a son of the father—forever. He was eternally secure as a son.*
2. *The adopted son immediately had all the rights of a legitimate son in the new family.*

3. *The adopted son completely lost all rights in his old family. The adopted son was looked upon as a new person—so new that old debts and obligations connected with his former family were cancelled out and abolished as if they never existed.* ⁱⁱ

B. The Grace (5b) – *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.* God has predestined the redeemed unto adopted children by the good pleasure of His will. He was never coerced or forced to provide for our adoption into the family, but willingly chose to make provision according to His good pleasure, which is always consistent with His sovereign will.

- Every born-again believer is a living testimony to the love and grace of the heavenly Father. He was in no way obligated to us. In fact, He would have been just and right to have condemned us in our sin and forced us to endure the eternal judgment sin deserved. However, by His grace, and in accordance to His will, He made provision for us through the sacrifice of His Son. What love and grace has been bestowed on those undeserving!

C. The Glory (6) – *To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.* Paul reveals the ultimate purpose in God's sovereign work regarding our salvation – the praise of the glory of His marvelous grace. As Paul considered the grace of God bestowed on undeserving sinners, he was overwhelmed and felt compelled to praise the glory of God. His grace has adopted us into the family, and we have been made acceptable in the beloved. We have been delivered from death and granted eternal life in Christ.

- As one considers the various aspects of salvation, in order to be consistent with biblical doctrine, one must begin with the Father. He devised a sovereign plan to provide for our redemption. All of this was done with us in mind, but the ultimate goal is to glorify Him. I am thankful for my salvation. I am the recipient of God's good grace, but I must remember my salvation is ultimately about glorifying God. He is the source and provision of my salvation. Apart from His grace, I would yet be in sin and condemned to eternal death. I have nothing to boast of but His abundant grace!

Conclusion: We have examined the first aspect of salvation – the sovereign work of God. If you are saved by grace, adopted into the family, you have received much. You have reason to praise God for His goodness and grace in your life. In fact, such a transformation ought to shape our thoughts and direct our lives. If you are yet unsaved, I urge you to respond to the Gospel, repent of sin, believe on the finished work of Christ on the cross to redeem your sin, and call on Him by faith to save you. He is faithful and He remains able. He is worthy of our submission and praise!

ⁱ Phillips, J. (2009). [*Exploring Ephesians & Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Eph 1:4a). Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp.

ⁱⁱ Leadership Ministries Worldwide. (1996). Galatians–Colossians (p. 59). Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide.