3-25-18

Ephesians 1:3-6

As we talked about last time, Paul is praising God while at the same time telling us about wonderful spiritual blessings that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit bestow upon us. We can begin now to look at these in more detail. But we must always be ready and willing to give God the glory for these blessings. We have not earned them, we deserve the opposite of these blessings, and we receive them only by God’s grace; His merciful and loving grace.

Verse 4 makes quite a statement: We are told that God chose us before the foundations of the world.
This idea comes up several times in the Bible in both the Old and the New Testament. It is sometimes referred to as election. Christians have been discussing the exact meaning of this for almost 2000 years. One possibility is that God determined all those who would accept Christ and be saved. Another possibility is that God foreknew all those who would accept Christ and chose them. A similar view is that God determined before creation that all those who accepted Jesus would be saved.

It is not my intent to go through all the arguments for each of these ideas. If all the Christians since Jesus haven’t come to a conclusion, I’m certainly not going to be able to. Even with the Biblical idea of election, we still have the responsibility to accept Christ for salvation. Paul points this out in verse 13 where he speaks of the Ephesians as having heard the Gospel and then believing.

Now, there are some things I can tell you about election and God’s choosing us in Christ, that lead to us blessing God in the way that Paul starts these verses. Remember always, that we did not seek God; He called to us. From Romans 3:11: “There is none who seeks after God”. It is not mankind’s nature to seek God. There are lots of articles and books, from a secular point of view that talk about seeking God; or perhaps how someone found God. The problem is that these people are seeking something to fill the space that God should occupy. The Bible tells us the space for God exists within us.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

How wonderful our sovereign God is! It is according to His plan when things happen; so, we can always be assured that He is in control. But we see that He has set eternity in our hearts; whatever else we choose to believe, somewhere deep inside, we know that death is not the end. This is the area that we seek to fill, and anything less than God will not work. Solomon goes on to tell us that man will not find out the work of God. This goes along with what Paul said about no one seeking after God. In our rebellion we turn from Him, and this is why He must come after us.

Here is grace and mercy: God does come after us. It is His desire that none should perish. Remember that we cannot even accept the Gospel unless the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to accept it. Paul reminds us of this later in Ephesians 2:8-9.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Although most of us can think back to that time when we said “yes” to Jesus, that time when we believed the Gospel and accepted the salvation He offered; we must understand that it is only because God enabled us to. The reason? So that we can’t boast, we can’t claim any part of our salvation whatsoever. And that leaves all the glory to God. This is why we bless Him and praise Him, we owe Him our eternal life.

This knowledge is what gives us security in our salvation. We have that guarantee that Jesus gave.

John 10:27-30

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.

Once the Father has chosen us, in whatever way that means, no one is going to take us away from Him. Once we accept Christ, we are His; we are His sheep. God gives us to Jesus and He in turn gives us eternal life. We rest secure in faith; and that is a big part of faith: believing that nothing can separate us from Jesus.

When you talk with people about this, eventually you will find someone who says, “If this is true, then I can accept Jesus and do whatever I want.” The answer to this is Yes and No. First let’s cover the No. When this statement is made, it is usually meant carnally. It means that I can engage in any sin I want to, and I’ll be forgiven because I have accepted Jesus. This is certainly wrong because to accept Jesus is to have some understanding of what He has done for us. If we have this understanding, the only proper response is praise and a desire to be pleasing to Him. Obviously, carnal behavior is not pleasing to Him.

When we truly accept Christ, our carnal nature has been nailed to the cross and our desires change. If this is the case, then yes, we can do what we want, because we want to be obedient to Jesus. Although it is still in our human nature to sin, and indeed, we continue to sin, we have no pleasure in it and we quickly repent. We saw this in 1 John 1:6, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” We who claim Christianity must make sure that we are not in darkness, continuing to allow some particular sin to remain in our lives.

As we continue in our Scripture, we see another reason that continuing in sin is not acceptable; He chose us that we would be holy and blameless before Him. Holy is to be set apart and pure, blameless is having nothing by which someone can accuse us of some wrong. Both of these ideas go back to the Old Testament sacrifices under the law of Moses. All the offerings were to be pure, without blemish, the best of the flocks or produce. We are chosen in Jesus, this is the only way we can achieve holiness and blamelessness.

Throughout our Christian lives, we undergo sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit. He works on us so that we become more like Jesus, who is perfect. This is a lifelong process; a goal we strive for by the power of the Holy Spirit, even though we won’t reach it during our life. When we pass on from this life, we will be completely sanctified, we will be completely free from sin. Our punishment had been taken by Jesus and we will be covered in His righteousness. This is when we will stand before Him, before God. Because we are in Christ, when we actually stand before God, in His presence, we will be holy and blameless. Satan, the accuser, will be silenced, to the glory of God.

The next thing we come to in our verses is the phrase “*in love*”. This is one of those places where Bible translators have to use their best judgement as to where it belongs. In some translations it comes at the end of the sentence, as in “*blameless before Him in love*”. This would mean that along with holiness and blamelessness, we would be loving. Love would be a part of our character. The other possibility is that it starts the next sentence; “*In love He predestined us*”. This would show the love on God’s part as He provides blessings that we don’t deserve.

Either way, the statements are true and important. We are called to love. The Bible makes it plain that we are to love God, we are to love our Christian brothers and sisters, and we are to love our neighbor whether they deserve it or not. This is a tall order and one we are not capable of by ourselves. Once again, the Holy Spirit is the One who enables us to have this love. Also, once again, we are imperfect at loving as we are called to. This is why we bless God; He holds us in His hand in mercy. Even in our imperfection, He looks upon His Son and we are safe.

Then there is the love of God, which is perfect. Recall from 1 John 4:8 where we are told, “God is love”. How comforting this is. We need never fear that God will have a bad day and get rid of us or let us fall into destruction. We are in Jesus, His beloved Son, nothing can separate us from Him; no one can snatch us out of His hand.

As we continue in verse 5, we see that we are predestined to be adopted. God decided long ago that any who accept Christ would become His children. Again, what do we have left to do but to praise Him. We must endeavor to keep in mind what He has done and thank Him. The apostle John muses on this in:

1 John 3:1

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

It does us good sometimes, to try to consider what this means. How mighty God is and how lovingly He brings us to Him. We are His creation and we turned from Him, but He is taking us back with more blessings than Adam and Eve had. John warns us that this will cause us trouble in the world. Still, whatever trouble we have here, God will help us through; then what comes in eternity will relieve us of any suffering we experience.

Being adoptive children of God also gives us even more assurance. God will not abandon His children. Just as our own Fathers held our hand to keep us safe when we were children, God now holds our hand. He will bring us through whatever storm we are in, whatever raging river we must cross, whatever darkness we face. This is the deep inner peace we are graced with through the Holy Spirit; this is the peace that passes all understanding.

This adoption is “*according to the kind intention of His will*”. It is our fallen nature to rebel against someone else’s will; we want to follow our own. But look at what God’s will involves: it is kind. Kindness is not something to rebel against, especially when it comes from God who is perfect in love for us. He intends good things for us and this is what He had in mind even before creation. It can be hard sometimes, but we must try to remember that God’s intentions toward us are always kind. Consider how Jesus wept over Jerusalem, longing to gather them to Himself; it is still God’s desire to bring us to Him in the same way.

In verse 6, Paul tells us that this is “*to the praise of the glory of His grace*”. Glory can appear and be thought of as light and God’s grace is so overwhelming that it even reflects that light. Grace is a part of who God is, it is part of His being or essence. His grace is poured out on us and freely given and He deserves praise for that. God owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. Yet, as Paul mentioned earlier, He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. What God has done for us should give us plenty to think about, and plenty of reason to obey the commands of His Son.

Notice how Jesus is the conduit for all these things. It is in Christ that we receive all those spiritual blessings. We Christians were chosen in Him and we were predestined to adoption through Him. This measureless grace has been freely bestowed on us in God’s beloved Son. When that moment comes in our lives that we bow our heads before Jesus and tell Him that we believe in Him as our only hope for redemption, in that moment we are saved. But also, at that moment, we are forever in Christ and heir to all this grace that God the Father has for us.

Prayer

Father, Your grace to us is beyond our comprehension. It is even grace that You accept the sorry attempt at gratitude we offer. It is our desire to do better, may Your Holy Spirit intercede for us that the prayers of thanksgiving we offer become pleasing to You.

We are so grateful, LORD, for the faith the Holy Spirit provided us, that we were able to believe on Your Son for salvation. We know that He is the only way, so by the faith You have provided, we cling to Him and depend on Him.

Your word tells us that there is so much more that You give to us. We ask with David, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?” It is only by Your grace that these things come to us, and so, we offer You praise, and pray that more glory be given to You. It is for us to glorify You, and by Your Holy Spirit we will do so.

We pray in the name of Your Son and our Saviour, Jesus

Amen