

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND
THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:
A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON EIGHT)

“ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED”

EPHESIANS 1:3-6 (KING JAMES VERSION)

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:

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:

5 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.

EPHESIANS 1:3-6 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.

In previous Lessons, we have observed that in **Ephesians 1:4-5**, the Apostle Paul begins to explain how the saints have come to possess “*all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*” In doing so, he introduces the ideas of election and predestination. In verse **four**, he speaks of our election. He says that we were chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world. In verse **five**, he makes reference to our **predestination**. He says that we were predestinated “*unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself.*”

In **Lesson 7**, we explained that the word “*adoption*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “to place, as an adult son.” As it is used by Paul in this context, the word refers to the act of God placing the persons whom He had elected, as adult sons. The term “*adoption*” emphasizes relationship and position. Its emphasis is not so much upon the **nature** of the son as it is upon the **status** of the son. The term highlights the **legal** status of the Christian, and all the privileges which come with that **legal** standing and position.

It is by adoption that we become joint-heirs with Christ, having been raised to a civil status as adult sons, thereby becoming heirs of God. We jointly inherit with Christ all that He possesses as an heir of God the Father, by virtue of His Sonship and work on the Cross.

We also stated that God has done all of this, “*according to the good pleasure of His will.*” The words “*good pleasure*” are the translation of a Greek word which indicates that God’s act of electing some persons unto salvation and His act of predestinating them unto the adoption of sons, was pleasing to Himself.

The word “will” is the translation of a Greek word which refers to “a desire which proceeds from one’s heart or emotions.” It expresses the fact that our election and God’s predestinating of us unto adoption, are not due to any merit or deserving in us or in anything outside of God Himself. They are acts wholly and solely of His own pure goodness, originating wholly and solely in the freedom of His own thoughts and deliberations. This emphasizes the idea that our salvation is from beginning to end, wholly and solely a work of God.

God was not moved to do all that He has done for us as a result of anything in us. Salvation is not according to man’s desire or request. Paul states this categorically in **Romans 9:15-16**: “*For God said to Moses, ‘I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.’ So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it*” (**New Living Translation**). Human beings by nature, do not desire salvation. Salvation is not a response on God’s part to anything that is in man. Salvation is entirely from God and in electing some to salvation and predestinating them to the adoption of sons, God was moved by His love, His mercy and His grace.

But what was it that motivated God to do all of this for wretched sinners? In verse **6**, Paul informs us of God’s great motive in our redemption. He advises us of the ultimate purpose in God’s mind which has led to all the spiritual blessings which we now enjoy as a result. The motive and purpose of it all was, “*to the praise of the glory of his grace.*” It was all for the glory of God.

Let us consider **1 Corinthians 1:26-31** in light of what we have just said:

26 *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:*

27 *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

28 *And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*

30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*

31 *That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

2 Corinthians 4:1-7 is also instructive:

1 *Therefore, since God in his mercy has given us this new way, we never give up.*

2 *We reject all shameful deeds and underhanded methods. We don’t try to trick anyone or distort the word of God. We tell the truth before God, and all who are honest know this.*

3 *If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing.*

4 *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*

5 *You see, we don’t go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus’ sake.*

6 *For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.*

7 *We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. (New Living Translation)*

Brothers and sisters, the wonder of wonders is that God has chosen to reveal the glory of His grace in us! He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestinated us unto the adoption of sons, that we might be to the praise of the glory of His grace! Above every other revelation of the glory of God that is recorded in the Scriptures, is the revelation of the glory of His grace in and through us! So remarkable is this revelation of the glory of God's in us, that in **Ephesians 3:8-11**, Paul indicates that God, in His great wisdom, is using The Church as a university for the angels:

8 *Though I am the least deserving of all God's people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ.*

9 *I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.*

10 *God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*

11 *This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Brothers and sisters, we have been called to reveal to human beings and to the angels the glory of God's grace. In **Matthew 5:14-16** our Lord said to His disciples, "*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

In **2 Peter 2:9-10**, we read the following: "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*"

Brothers and sisters, this is our privilege and our responsibility. The ultimate aim of our election and predestination, in fact, the ultimate aim of the entire plan and process of salvation is the glory of God. One of the greatest truths about salvation is that it is a revelation of the glory of God. In salvation, the glory of God is manifested in and through His grace. Praise is called forth from the children of God by the glory of God which is revealed in His grace. The grace of God reveals the character of God. In praising God for what He has done for us, we learn to praise Him for who and what He is.

This grace is described as that "*wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.*" The word "*accepted*" is the translation of the Greek word **charitoo, Khar-ee-to'-o**; which means "to grant special favour to, to honour in a special way." The Greek word **charitoo**, is translated "*highly favoured*" in **Luke 1:28** referring to Mary: "*And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.*" Just as He favoured Mary highly, God has highly favoured us. He has honoured us in a special way by "*accepting us in the beloved.*"

To be accepted is one of the greatest psychological needs of human beings, and our psychological needs reflect our spiritual needs. Every human being has a desire to be accepted by other human beings. We go to great lengths in order to be accepted by persons. But our need to be accepted by other people is nothing to be compared with our need to be accepted by God. The problem with us being accepted by God is that our sinful natures are wholly unacceptable to God. His absolute holiness rejects what we are by nature and rejects what we do as a result of what we are. And yet, amazingly, God does accept us!

The reason for His acceptance of us lies in the phrase *“in the Beloved.”* God does not accept us because of anything that has to do with us. He accepts us as we are in Jesus Christ, the beloved.

The word *“Beloved,”* referring to the Lord Jesus, is the translation of the Greek word for love, **agapao (ag-ap-ah'-o)**. It speaks of the love that God is, and of the love with which He loves the lost. It also refers to the love which is produced in the heart of the yielded believer by the Holy Spirit. The verb is in the perfect tense in the Greek. The perfect tense speaks of an action completed in past time which, in a context like this one, has present and permanent results. It speaks of the fact that the Father loved the Son in times past with an absolute love, and that this is a permanent attitude on His part.

The words *“in the Beloved”* are locative of sphere. That is, God freely bestowed on us the grace which saved us, and He did so in the sphere of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. The grace of God could not effect our salvation apart from the atoning death of our Lord, for God is not only a loving God, but a righteous and just God who cannot pass by sin, but must require that it be paid for. Only when sin is paid for can God manifest His grace.

It is very critical that we recognize that the term *“Beloved,”* does not only inform us about the Father’s love for the Son, but it also informs us about the Father’s love for us. Not only were we chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestinated unto the adoption of sons; not only were we so chosen and predestinated to the praise of the glory of His grace, but God has highly favoured us and honoured us in a very special way by accepting in the Beloved. Because we are accepted in the Beloved, God loves us as much as He loves Jesus Christ! Do you think I am exaggerating? I assure you that this is the testimony of the Scriptures. In fact, it is the testimony of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. In **John 17:20-23**, we read the following excerpt of the Lord’s prayer to His *Father*:

20 *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;*

21 *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

22 *And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*

23 *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, **and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.***

The Passion Translation renders verse **23** as follows; *“You live fully in me and now I live fully in them so that they will experience perfect unity, and the world will be convinced that you have sent me, **for they will see that you love each one of them with the same passionate love that you have for me.**”*

Is there a more amazing idea in the Bible? This statement by our Lord makes the most extraordinary demands on Christian faith. God not only loves us, He not only loves us with an unconditional, sacrificial love, but He loves us with the same degree of love that He loves His only begotten Son!

Brothers and sisters, if these words were not recorded in the Bible, I would not believe that such a thing could be possible. But they are recorded! Jesus Himself spoke these words, and so I am forced to accept that it is not only possible but that it is indeed so.

The truth about us as Christians is that because we are *“in Christ,”* because we are adopted in Him, the Beloved, God loves us as much as He loves the One who we are in! This takes us even beyond son-ship; this speaks of an intimacy with God that is stupendous.

There are other passages that support this statement of our Lord. In **Colossians 3:12**, Paul writes the following: *“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and **beloved**, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.”* The word *“beloved”* in this verse which refers to the saints, is a translation of the same Greek word that is translated as *“beloved”* in **Ephesians 1:6**, referring to Jesus. Both the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are in Him are the beloved of God.

Listen to Paul again as he writes to the Christians in Thessalonica in **2 Thessalonians 2:13**: *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren **beloved** of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”* Again, the word *“beloved”* in this verse, referring to Christians, is a translation of the same Greek word that is translated as *“beloved”* in **Ephesians 1:6**, referring to our Lord. The verse not only speaks of us as *“brethren,”* but also as *“beloved of the lord,”* because God *“hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”*

It is because everything we have is *“in the beloved”* that we ourselves have become *“the beloved.”*