

The Father's Purpose, Ephesians 1:1-6

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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. We are currently three weeks in to a sermon series in the letter of Ephesians subtitled, "Into the Fullness of Christ". If you've been with us, then you know that we actually spent the first two weeks in the book of Acts learning about how God's kingdom first came and then continued in Ephesus, how God planted a little part of his family, the church.

Today we are transitioning into Paul's letter to the Ephesians itself, so I invite you to turn there in your Bibles with me. You can find it on page 976 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. While you're doing that, let me make the connection between Acts and Ephesians for us.

Probably six or seven years have passed since Paul was with the Ephesians. During the majority of that time he has been in prison, first in Jerusalem and then ending up in Rome, where he probably now writes this letter. What's been happening in Ephesus during that time? We're not exactly sure, but what we do know is this: Christians in Ephesus and the surrounding region have been trying to be faithful to King Jesus instead of going back to their old way of life. These are people who once found their life's purpose in wielding power:

- The power to be provided for through their worship of the goddess Artemis
- The power to be protected by the use of magic, omens, and the stars
- The power to be prosperous by taking advantage of a booming economy

What in the world would their purpose in life be now? Well, that new purpose is precisely what Paul writes to them about.¹ Thus the title of today's sermon is "The Father's Purpose," and the main idea is "Bless the Father who has blessed us." That will serve as the beginning and ending point in verses 3 and 6. How is it that the Father has blessed us? What is it that leads us to bless him in response? It's that:

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), Loc 971, 2237

- 1) He chose us to be his blameless family - v. 4
- 2) He adopted us to be his beloved family - v. 5

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Ephesians 1:1-6. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:1-6

The Lord has spoken to us. [Congregation:] Thanks be to God! You may be seated.

Exposition

One of my greatest delights in being a father is being able to tell my children, "I love you." Sometimes I like to ask them, "Do you know why I love you? Is it because you behaved well today? Is it because you colored me a pretty picture? Is it because you're smart and funny?" To all these things they have learned to say, "No, no, no." Then I will tell them, "I love you...because *you're mine*. You belong to me."²

I think I do this in part because the message I interpreted from my own childhood went something like this: 'When I'm behaving or performing well, I am loved. But when I am not behaving or performing well, I am not loved.' It was an anchorless existence, where I was like a released kite either flying high in the wind or lying crumpled on the ground. Instead, I want my children to grow up anchored by the reality that their value is based on something outside their own effort, something that cannot change. I want this because, ultimately, I think it's what will prepare them to receive God's love.

From the very beginning of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it's like he's answering the question, 'Dear children, do you know why God loves you?' He begins in verse 1:

² Matt Chandler and Jared C. Wilson, *To Live Is Christ to Die Is Gain* (Colorado Springs: David. C. Cook, 2013) 103-104

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:1*

Now, this is the standard way to start an ancient letter, but there's more to it than that.³ The bio Paul gives for himself doesn't just show the authority behind his words, but that he didn't appoint himself to belong to God this way. Perhaps it's clearer in his letter of First Timothy, where he says that Jesus "[appointed] me to his service [even] though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man...Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."⁴

I think it's helpful to remind ourselves here that so much of the kingdom power put on display in Acts 19 and 20, and so much of the amazing truth we're going to learn from Ephesians, it came through the *absolute worst person God could possibly choose!* That should give hope to sinners like us who fall back into thinking God loves us based on our performance.

But don't just look at Paul's bio, look at how he describes the recipients of his letter. They are "saints [who] are faithful in Christ Jesus". Saints?! ("Playoffs?!")⁵

- These are people who still sometimes go to the witch doctor when their children are sick.
- These are people who still sometimes roll in the hay with a temple prostitute after a stressful day at work.
- These are people who still sometimes refuse to eat with church members of a different ethnicity.

And yet they are *saints*—not because of their saintly behavior, but because God has chosen and made them holy as his people. He's given them a new identity, which then allows them to grow into that identity.⁶

How has God given them this new identity? By making them "faithful in Christ Jesus". What's in view here isn't they're earning it by their own faithfulness, but they're being

³ Arnold, Loc 1567

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:12-15, NIV; Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP, 1989), 51-52; Arnold, Loc 1596

⁵ "Playoffs???" The Sound Byte," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3-eavMSBnk>

⁶ Arnold, Loc 1596; Foulkes, 52

counted faithful before God because of their relationship to Jesus Christ. They are often faithless toward God, but they are now *in Christ*—and he’s always faithful toward God (because he is God!).

This phrase, “in Christ,” is Paul’s favorite way to sum up the gospel. He will use it eleven times in his opening sentence alone.⁷ If you’ve been around Antioch, then you know I have a favorite way of explaining this phrase: through the story of Noah’s ark.

The Bible tells us in that day humanity had become so wicked that every intention of the thought of their hearts were only evil continually; and so God decided to destroy the world with a flood and start over. Graciously, however, he chose one man through whom to offer a way of salvation: Noah. Noah was called to build an ark and enter into it. When the time came God himself sealed the door and Noah and his family were safe inside until the wrath of God was poured out. Then they came out to a new world.

Likewise today, the wrath of God against sin is coming again, and this time God has chosen another man through whom to offer a way of salvation: Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross in the place of sinner and rising again, people can climb up *in Christ* by faith and repentance, taking refuge from the fire of God’s wrath. The only ones who will survive to see the new heavens and new earth will be those who have been sealed safely *in Christ*.

In light of that, Paul can say to the Ephesians and to us (in verse 2):

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:2

Now, the standard way to start an ancient letter is with the word *χαίρειν*, which means “Greetings”. But instead Paul uses the word *χάρις*, which means “Grace”. So as God’s family his communication with us does not simply begin *distantly* as “Greetings to you,” but *intimately* as “Grace to you”.

Because of our sin and rebellion what we deserve to hear from God is actually more like this (let me replace a couple key words): ‘*Disfavor* to you and *discord* from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Woe to you “children of wrath...[who have] no hope and [are] without God in the world,” as Paul will later say to describe our past.⁸ And yet because of the Father’s purpose to make us alive in Christ, you can sum up God’s heart

⁷ Foulkes, 52-53; Arnold, Loc 1800

⁸ Ephesians 2:3, 12; Isaiah 30:1

toward us, and sum up the letter of Ephesians like this: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Church, this is just the first two verses! As one scholar put it, “Ephesians—carefully [considered]—will change our lives. It is not so much a question of what we will do with the [letter], but what it will do with us.”⁹ Here’s what I pray it will do with us: that it will lead us to bless the Father who has blessed us.

Bless the Father Who Has Blessed Us - v. 3

This brings us to our opening point of application today, which will also be our closing point. Read with me in verse 3:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, Ephesians 1:3

Paul is kicking off one sentence here that spans 202 words all the way to verse 14.¹⁰ And the way he does it is in part very Jewish, offering a blessing of praise to God. What isn’t very Jewish about it, however, is the primary reason why Paul blesses God: it’s because God is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. This isn’t just making an undeniable Father-Son connection between God and Jesus. It’s Paul’s way of saying, from the very beginning, that the invisible God is made visible through Jesus; that the inaccessible God is made accessible through Jesus.¹¹

In other words, God the Father has blessed his family with every possible blessing *through his Son Jesus Christ*. Jesus Christ is kind of like Amazon—any blessing that the Father orders for you, it’s Jesus who makes it possible to be delivered to your front door.

Now, to put it that way brings up the question, “What exactly are these blessings delivered to my front door?”

- Are they financial prosperity?
- Are they, as one man lectured me and Jason Cox one day at Sunergos, the power to never be sick again?

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), Loc 155

¹⁰ Arnold, Loc 1677

¹¹ Arnold, Loc 1758; Foulkes, 54

- Are they, as so many people say when they come back from a missions trip, “Man, we are just so blessed here in America” (meaning because we have all this stuff)?

Paul describes them as “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”. What in the world does that mean?

For one, we have to keep in mind the literal meaning of the word “blessing,” which is to speak well of someone. So we might say, in every way possible we are *well spoken of* in heavenly places.¹² (For those of you today who are in Christ but struggle to believe and feel that God loves you, perhaps it is helpful to know that when your name comes up before God [and it does], it is spoken of with approval and delight.)

But what exactly are “the heavenly places”? Well, Paul uses this phrase five times in Ephesians:

- In 1:20 Jesus is said to be exalted “in the heavenly places”.
- In 3:10 the wisdom of God is being made known to the principalities and powers “in the heavenly places”.
- In 6:12 the sphere of spiritual conflict against the forces of evil is “in the heavenly places”.
- And, most closely connected with the subject here, in 2:6 God has already “raised us up” and “seated us with [Jesus] in the heavenly places”.¹³

What we’re getting at here is “the unseen world of spiritual reality”. Joel Osteen says that when you’re driving through Walmart parking lot, and that spot opens up for you right next to the front door, that’s how you know God wants to bless you. (Thanks Joel, but what about the 999,000 thousands times that spot doesn’t open up?!) Paul says you can know God wants to bless you because Jesus Christ has opened up a parking spot for your name before the Father in heaven—forever.

So no wonder Paul blessed the Father who has blessed us! And no wonder he says ‘the heck with punctuation’ and goes on through verse 14 helping us understand what exactly these heavenly blessings are. There are two we will consider today.

¹² Arnold, Loc 1780

¹³ Foulkes, 54-55

1) He Chose Us to Be His Blameless Family - v. 4

The first blessing is this: he chose us to be his blameless family. Read with me in verse 4: (The Father has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,)

4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Ephesians 1:4

This brings to mind the journey of a family adopting a child. For those who have fostered or adopted, you know, that child doesn't just suddenly appear one day at your home and become yours. No, there are often years of intentional choices to be made before adoption becomes a reality. Yes, once it's official then so many other blessings of being family can flow, but none of them can happen without first the resolute decision.

The same is true of the doctrine of election, the reality that God chose his family in Christ from eternity past. Without it, the other blessings cannot begin to flow.¹⁴ Yes, that means at Antioch we teach election—but not because we're a bunch of Southern Seminary grads or John Piper fans. We teach it because the Bible teaches it. But I want to be sensitive here. There has been much damage done—not by the doctrine of election—but by those who hold it with arrogance and superiority.

From beginning to end, the Bible makes it very clear that God is the One who initiates relationships. We see him choosing both individuals and groups to be in relationship with him. Perhaps the most helpful example is that of Abraham, the father of faith. Many Christians' understanding of Abraham (or Abram) is that God may have chosen him, but only because God knew he would choose him back, that he would have faith. And indeed, Abraham was responsible for responding to God in faith, but Joshua 24 tells us that before God came to him, Abraham and his father were serving other gods.¹⁵

And what about the people who came from Abraham, the Jews? Did God choose them because they were the most righteous? No, Deuteronomy 9 tells us they were one of the most stubborn!¹⁶

¹⁴ Foulkes, 55

¹⁵ Joshua 24:3

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 9:6

If that was true for Abraham and his people, then what about you and me? What it does is it defeats any reason we could give for getting God's attention, any achievement we can boast in for getting God's love:

- Well, my parents were Christians.
- Well, I have been going to church for years.
- Well, I do more good than bad.
- Well, I know a lot about the Bible.

Paul says, 'No! Before we even existed, before we even had the ability to choose, God chose us.'

"Chose us for what?" we might ask. For one, he chose us to be *in Christ*. That means before the world even began, he chose that Jesus Christ would come and achieve salvation for us; that for sins we hadn't even committed yet he would suffer and die as a sacrifice in our place, and then rise so that we too could rise to new life. Revelation 13 brings this together with the same term Paul uses, saying that "before the foundation of the world" our names were written down and Jesus the Lamb was appointed to be slain for them.¹⁷

But also, God chose us so that "we should be holy and blameless before him". Many people struggle with the doctrine of election because according to human logic it appears to make robots out of us; it seems to take away our freedom (and don't mess with Americans' freedom!). It's like, "If God elects, then why do anything—believe, obey, evangelize, avoid sin—because God has already determined everything!" No, that's fatalism, and the Bible doesn't teach fatalism.

Instead, right alongside divine election, the Bible teaches human responsibility. In fact, the other place where Paul refers to "before the foundation of the earth" is in chapter 2, where he's not talking about salvation but good works: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, *which God prepared beforehand*, that we should walk in them."¹⁸ God has elected you so that you would overflow with the fruit of obedience!

Therefore we are chosen to be (1) holy (that's set apart for God, not like the rest of the world) and (2) blameless (that's perfect in every motive, thought, word, and action).¹⁹

¹⁷ Revelation 13:8; Arnold, Loc 1841

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:10

¹⁹ Foulkes, 55-56

Anyone here robotically woken up blameless yet? No way! In our subjective, day-to-day human experience, we have to strive to grow as Christians. And in the same way in our subjective human experience we have to strive to repent and believe in order to become Christians in the first place. What we need not forget in all this experience (and this is what Paul is getting at) is that *if God had not chosen us first, we would never choose him.*²⁰ He chose us to be his blameless family.

2) He Adopted Us to Be His Beloved Family - v. 5

That's the first of the Father's great blessings. The second one that Paul mentions is this: he adopted us to be his beloved family. Read with me in verse 5:

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, Ephesians 1:5

Now it's likely that the word that tends to rise off the page and block the rest of the verse is "predestined". Recently Jeremy told me about a pastoral interview he did back home where the very first question was, "Do you believe in predestination?" Not—"Can you tell us a little about yourself?" or "How did you come to know Christ?" or "What about your sense of calling?" That's how controversial this word can be.

How is it a blessing that God would predestine anyone? Isn't it cold and heartless to control people's fate that way? Well, let's allow Paul to explain himself by simply walking through this verse one phrase at a time.

What two words does he begin with (I believe)? "In love". What these two little words show us is the *motive* behind the Father's predestining. When a family has been changed by Jesus and makes the decision to adopt, it may involve desires such as growing their family, or living on mission in a very tangible way, or tackling something really challenging together. But you know what's usually the deepest motive behind it all? Love.²¹

And that's why Paul's mention of the Father's motive, "In love," flows immediately into the Father's purpose: "for adoption". The best way to describe God's predestination is through this metaphor. In adoption, a child who cannot claim any right of belonging to a family, is then freely given the same right of belonging as a child by birth. Paul will later describe us as "children of wrath," separated from God because of our sin, no right of

²⁰ Hughes, Loc 306

²¹ Arnold, Loc 1885

belonging to him. “But God...because of the great love with which he loved us,” took the initiative to adopt us by grace.²²

And he adopted us—look at the next phrase—“to himself”. When I began meditating on this passage last week, these were the two words that affected me most. It’s one thing to think of a father saying, “You’re adopted in this family now, so hey—you oughta be thankful.” It’s a whole other thing to think of that father saying, “You’re adopted in this family now, and hey, *I am so delighted*.” That’s the intimate, relational sense in which we are to take this phrase.²³

So the Father “predestined us for adoption to himself”—next phrase—“as sons”. Someday at Antioch I want to do a sermon series on the doctrine of sonship, the reality that God gives his children—both male and female, no distinction—the same rights and inheritance as the first-born Son, Jesus Christ. For now, I just want to highlight this: in the entire Old Testament, God is only referred to as “Father” fourteen times. And yet when Jesus showed up, he only ever addressed God as “Father”. And not the formal term for it, but “Abba,” the word children used for “Daddy”. This is why Paul says in Romans 8 that if you have received Jesus then “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”²⁴ We are adopted “as sons”.

And “as sons”—next phrase—“through Jesus Christ”. Jesus doesn’t just take our place on the cross and in the tomb. He takes our place before God, our status, such that whatever the Father thinks of Jesus, that’s what he thinks of those in Jesus. What is Jesus’ status? Look at the end of verse 6: he is “the Beloved”. Multiple times during Jesus’ life his Father audibly announced, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”²⁵ If you are in Christ, this is exactly what the Father says of you.²⁶

And all this is—last phrase—“according to the purpose of his will” (or it might also be translated, his good pleasure, which again emphasizes the delight with which the Father predestined, like a potter with fresh clay in his hands).²⁷ But what I want you to see even more so is how this brings everything full circle. Why would Paul be writing to these Ephesians about election and predestination? Because more than anything else they needed to know their new purpose in life. It used to be in choosing Artemis from the beginning of each day. Now, Paul says, it’s in being chosen by God from the foundation

²² Ephesians 2:3-5; Foulkes, 56

²³ Arnold, Loc 1906

²⁴ Romans 8:15; Hughes, Loc 350

²⁵ Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35

²⁶ Arnold, Loc 1947; Foulkes, 57

²⁷ Arnold, Loc 1927

of the world. It's in being adopted as his beloved family and given the power to wield every good work. Now that's a purpose to live for!²⁸

Bless the Father Who Has Blessed Us - v. 6

This brings us to our closing point of application today (which I hope is familiar to you by now): bless the Father who has blessed us. In verse 6 we read that the Father's glorious purposes for us are meant to lead us

⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
Ephesians 1:6

In other words, the Father's glorious purposes for us are ultimately meant to serve an even greater purpose: the glory of God.²⁹ Without verse 6 we might as well be obsessed with ourselves like children who can do whatever we want; or be overwhelmed with pressure like children who need to live up to their privileges. But *with* verse 6, we see that rightly receiving these glorious purposes leads primarily to one thing: *praise*. Because it had nothing to do with me.

You know, I have heard many people, when they encounter these truths about God, literally say, "If that's what God is like, then I don't want to know him." One of those people is in this room right now, I'm just gonna call them out. You know who it is? Me.

Like some of you, I came from a background that taught that God's salvation is entirely a matter of choice; that he even limits his knowledge of who will be saved so as not to mess with human freedom. You know when that changed for me? While sitting alone in my house as a missionary, reading my Bible. No professors or popular books, just me and Ephesians.

And you know what I felt like I was hearing from this God whom I had said I didn't care to know? "Brad, do you know why I love you? Is it because you behaved well today? Is it because you did a great job being a missionary? Is it because you're smart or funny? No, no, no. I love you...because *you're mine*."

And you know what that led to? Praise!

²⁸ Arnold, Loc 1906

²⁹ Arnold, Loc 1927

So here's your application today, church: bless the Father who has blessed you. Soak in these truths and literally bless/affirm/praise God by thanking him and singing to him. Get it out of your head, down into your heart, and out of your mouth. Do it today in this gathering, do it this week in a Family Group, and then do it alone with just you and your Bible. If you're still in a place where you find these truths troubling, talk to a pastor or a trusted friend who can listen and share their journey with you.

And you may be here today as someone who, like me, has been known to say, "If that's what God is like, then I don't want to know him." If that's you, then I want to give voice to the Father's tender invitation: come and get to know him as he is. He wants to know you as you are.

Communion

And to prove it, on the night that he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, "This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord's death until he returns." **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ delivers the Father's purpose for us.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you're a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you're a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you're not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let's pray.

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