

Sermon – 20/01/2008 am

Predestined to Adoption

Study Text: Ephesians 1:5–6

One morning many years ago a newborn baby was left on our doorstep. It had probably been born during the night. Like all babies it was completely helpless – we thought she was dead. Fed milk from a dropper, and given proper care, the baby lived.

A married couple we knew dearly wanted a baby. We told them about this baby, but they were hesitant. Adopting a foreign baby was a lot of trouble and they were careful not to get their hopes up. We gave them the baby to look after. They soon loved the baby so much they were willing to do anything to adopt her as their own child. In over 40-degree heat and dust they went from one office to another to get formal adoption papers signed. That girl is not only loved enormously but now has all the legal rights of a biological child.

Formal adoption was not part of Jewish custom but it was possible under Roman law. Roman citizens could legally adopt a child and that child would then have the same rights as a naturally born son. The adopted son would share in the inheritance. As a Roman citizen, the apostle Paul was familiar with this practice. He is the only New Testament writer to use the term ‘adoption’. He uses this word to describe the position of believers within the family of God the Father – we are adopted children of God (literarily to place as a son 1:5, *cf.* Romans 8:16).

Predestined

The doxology which began in verse 3 continues with Paul outlining the spiritual blessings we have in Christ Jesus. He spoke firstly of God choosing us in Christ. He did this before the world began. He goes on in this verse to speak of predestination, a truth closely related to that of sovereign election. Predestination literarily means ‘to mark out beforehand’. We might translate it as ‘foreordain’, but not simply ‘foreknowledge’ as some want.

‘The decrees of God’ says the Shorter Catechism ‘are his eternal purpose according to the council of his will whereby for his own glory he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass’ (SC Q7). This passage in Ephesians is one of the Biblical references included in the supporting texts when the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) was prepared. God has foreordained all things, including our salvation.

God chose us; he set his love on us, before the world began. And furthermore he predetermined to adopt us into his family. God did not simply choose us and wait for our response to his choice. He did not just say he loved us and hope that we would respond. This is what some people think. They say God loves everyone but only some respond to his love. In fact there are those who say God loves everyone and all will be saved in the end.

God is love. God is rich in mercy and grace. But he is also almighty and powerful. He is sovereign. God knows that you have no power to respond to his love. Let us not fool ourselves about what is called free will. Our free will is the same free will that that newborn baby had on our doorstep.

That baby was not quite dead, but Paul says that we were dead in sin when God set his love on us and made us alive in Christ (2:1, 5). In another place he says that in our natural state our thinking is actually opposed to God (Romans 8:7). *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit* (Romans 8:8, 9). It is the Holy Spirit who makes us alive to Christ according to the predetermined will of God.

Paul spoke of predestination knowing from his own experience that he did not choose Jesus. He hated Jesus and all who followed him until the day, until the very moment when Jesus appeared to him. He knew that he was saved by grace alone, grace that is the gift of God. That is why he writes as he does here in praise of the glory of his (God's) grace.

Augustine was man like Paul. His life prior to his conversion was not pleasing to God. Augustine held firmly to this truth of predestination even as some in the church, namely Pelagius, wanted to deny it. Pelagius taught that God has endowed all people with the power of self-determination. Some he claimed choose to live good lives and God will accept such people. Augustine led the church in condemning Pelagianism.

Centuries later the doctrine of predestination was again under attack in the church. Some wanted to say that it was only foreknowledge. All they would agree to is that God knows who will believe in Jesus. They rejected the Augustinian view. Arminius was one such church leader. The Reformed church countered Arminius and his fellow theologians, upholding the teaching of John Calvin on predestination. Arminianism was condemned at the Synod of Dort (1618) with the declaration of the so-called five points of Calvinism.

The teaching of Arminius, that is, that God is not sovereign in election and predestination is still widely held. Many churches teach that God only knows beforehand who will turn to him – foreknowledge not foreordination or predestination. What we find here in the Bible is that God predestined us to adoption as sons by Christ Jesus.

Adopted

In love God the Father predestined us to adoption as his sons. He determined, again from before creation, to adopt whom he chose. Predestination was *according to the good pleasure of his will*. In other words it was entirely from God's side.

Adoption is a clear and wonderful way of describing how we enter the family of God. Adoption is the outcome of predestination. Our adoption is by/through Jesus Christ. Simply put – no Jesus then no adoption. As Calvin said 'the Son of God became the Son of Man that the sons of men might become the sons of God'. It is in Christ, it is because we are cleansed of sin by his blood, that we are adopted by God. The unity of the Godhead is amazing.

Adoption is a clear and wonderful way to describe how we not only enter the family of God, but how we live in the family of God. By adoption we are children of God. As children we are loved by God – his love was on us as we have seen from the beginning. If children feel safe and secure in the presence of their earthly father how much more should we feel safe and secure in the presence of our heavenly Father.

As children we bear the name of God. We are called children of God, or as later in the church 'Christians'. Children should uphold the honour of their father's name. Are you proud of the

name by which you are called? Are you proud to be called a Christian? Will you always defend the name of God or will you deny the glorious name of the One who loves you beyond measure (3:18).

As adopted children we are heirs. We are heirs *of God and joint heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17). You may have been a beneficiary of the estate of your deceased Father. This inheritance is your right as a child. The workers in your fathers business did not get an inheritance – just the children. As children of God you have a wonderful inheritance. It is kept in heaven for you. It is an inheritance you have by adoption and an inheritance that none can take from you (I Peter 1:4-5).

We are *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*. We are royal heirs for Christ has a kingdom. Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God. We also will be raised in Christ. Jesus ascended to his heavenly home. We also have a home in heaven. Jesus was exalted to the throne in heaven. We who overcome will sit with Jesus on his throne (Revelation 3:21). We will judge the world and even the angels (I Corinthians 6:3). Does not such an inheritance in Christ far surpass any earthly inheritance you may get?

To The Praise of His Glory

Why has God done all this for us and to us? Why has he set his love on us and adopted us into his family? There was nothing attractive in us or about us when God did this. We were by nature deserving of his wrath not his love.

It was all because of the sovereign will of God. It was all according to his good pleasure. It was a divine decision, the depths of which we in our humanity cannot fathom. God chose us because he chose us. *God will have mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens. Who are you to reply against God* (Romans 9:18). How humbled and how thankful we are that God has predestined us – and called us and justified us, and glorified us in Christ.

Remember how God said to Satan ‘have you seen my servant Job, a man who is blameless and upright’. Job was a man who brought glory to God, not only on earth but in the heavenly realms. God was glorified in this faithful servant.

So it is that every faithful servant, all who are chosen to be holy and blameless are *to the praise of his glory* (1:6). The grace of God is so uniquely amazing and wonderful that God is glorified in all the earth and heaven. You are a walking witness to the grace of God and as such, like Job, bring glory to God. Is this something you need to think about and pray about? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

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