

Adoption: Determined Treasure from Eternity

Ephesians 1:3-6

By [Derek Thomas](#)

Turn in your hymnals just for a second. We'll get to the Bible in just a minute, but turn back to your hymnals to #525, "A Child of the King," and verse 3. "I once was an outcast, stranger on Earth, a sinner by choice, and an alien by birth. But I've been adopted; my name's written down; an heir to a mansion, a robe and a crown. I'm the child of the King, a child of the King. With Jesus my Savior, I'm the child of a King." And that's going to be our theme this fall as the temperatures become civilized once more, as it becomes something of a joy to actually live in Mississippi again. We're going to be considering the doctrine of adoption, that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we have been brought into a relationship with our Heavenly Father whereby we are called His children. Now we have a text this evening; it's taken from Ephesians chapter 1. And I want us to consider together verses 3-6, but let's begin at the first verse of Ephesians 1. Hear the word of God.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word. Let's pray together.

Father, we need Your blessing. Without You we can do nothing. We pray as we now turn our thoughts and our hearts toward the scriptures that by Your spirit You would cause the word which we have just read to be illumined. Give us understanding in Your precepts, in Your Law. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Nearly all the wisdom that we possess--that is to say, true and sound wisdom--consists principally in this: in knowing God and in knowing ourselves. Thus the opening sentence of Calvin's *Institutes*. Forgive me for beginning with Calvin. I'll

get to the Bible in just a second, but forgive me for starting right there but I do so for a reason. Because for John Calvin in his famous book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the doctrine of adoption was crucial. There isn't much material on this doctrine. Not many books have been written on the doctrine of adoption. *The Westminster Confession* gives it a little section all to itself on adoption in chapter 12, but very few books have been written on it. There's a wonderful book written by a Scottish Presbyterian, Robert S. Candlish, really dealing with the whole issue of the fatherhood of God. I perhaps should mention the southern theologian, John Girardeau, who also wrote wonderfully on this topic. But many theologians have not. Some of the great systematic theologians, Berkhof for example, just give the doctrine of adoption a third of a page. Just one third of a page. And part of the reason for that is that in the history of the understanding of this truth, adoption and justification have been linked together. But not so in John Calvin. There's a sense in which, for Calvin, knowing God and knowing ourselves is intimately related to our understanding of God as our Father. It's understanding the fatherly kindness of God in our lives.

The aim of this series--and it has several aims--but the aim of this series is that we might get to know God, get to know Him more fully, learn to relate to Him as His children, have a greater realization of who we are as the children of God, the grace of God that has brought us into a living and vital relationship with Jesus Christ by faith. That we are the children of God. That we are heirs with God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. I want us to see something of the enormous privileges which are ours, the blessings which are ours as the children of God, blessings which are breathtaking in their scope.

Somebody was telling me yesterday they're off to an expensive lunch with a very important person. Awe-inspiring as that probably will be, something to remember as that probably will be, a conversation-piece for years to come as that probably will be; it pales into insignificance with the fact that every time we sit down at table, Jesus, our elder brother, sits down with us. We give thanks to God as our Heavenly Father in whose presence we sit and eat and commune. I want you to see why it is that somebody like Jim Packer says of this doctrine in its New Testament glory that it is "the crowning blessing of the New Testament."

I want us to see why it is that Jesus teaches His disciples that the first words that should come out of our lips when we pray is "Our Father who art in heaven." It's a doctrine that's deeply relational, touches us at the level of our emotional and psychological and affectional lives. For me, it's a wonderful truth. I've related this to you before: that growing up in what we now euphemistically call a "dysfunctional family," I found in Christ, in a relationship with Christ, and in a relationship with God as my Heavenly Father, a family relationship that, to be honest, I didn't have as a child. And therefore this doctrine, this wonderful truth of adoption, has a multi-faceted nature. I hope we get to see some of that during this fall.

My friend, Geoff Thomas in Aberystwyth, Wales, after almost 40 years of being the minister--I think he's in his 39th year as the minister of Alfred Place Baptist Church--has just begun a series of sermons on Ephesians. They are going to be perhaps his crowning achievement of 40 years of preaching. No, he hasn't reached verse 3. I was hoping to go to the website this week and just have a glimpse of what he had to say about this text. But, alas, he preached three sermons, and the opening two verses never got to verse 3.

Now turn with me to Ephesians 1 and to verse 5. We read here that God has predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will. This is one of Paul's most glorious letters, along perhaps with Romans. And perhaps an argument can be made for putting Romans right at the top and as the pinnacle, but if you ask me honestly, I think I prefer Ephesians. There's something beautiful about Ephesians, something about its structure, something about its balance: three chapters of doctrine and three chapters of practice. There's something beautifully symmetrical about Ephesians.

Adoption, Paul is telling us, and this is the opening sentence, and actually in the Greek it's one of these long sentences. From verse 3 all the way down to verse 14 is one sentence in the original. In our English translations we have to punctuate and put in a period here and there in order to break this sentence down. But it's as though Paul has second and third breath, and he wants us to catch something of the enormity of the blessing of God for us. And adoption, he is saying, is one of the jewels. One of the jewels he calls "the riches of His grace." Something which he describes as having "lavished upon us." God has crowned us with riches and treasures, and adoption is one of them. I want us to catch something of the glory; it's something for which Paul in verse 3 wants to bless God for. It's something that brings forth from within him praise and adoration and worship.

I. The realm of blessing.

Now let's look at it together. There are five things said of God's word of grace and blessing that I want us to see, and, first of all, the realm of blessing. The realm of blessing. We are we are told, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, in the heavenly places. Actually it's a word which crops up a number of times in this letter of Paul to the Ephesians. If you turn forward to chapter 2:6, he speaks of Christians having been raised up with Christ and seated with Christ, where? In the heavenly places. Go back to chapter 9: he's talking about the revelation of the gospel, something which he calls in verse 9 "the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." Verse 10: "In order that the manifold, the variegated wisdom of God, might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places." There's something about the revelation of the gospel that takes place not just in the world that you and I see, not simply in the

world that you and I can touch and feel, but in a cosmic world, in the heavenly places, in the realms of angels and archangels and even demonstrated before fallen angels and even Satan himself. God is disclosing something of the wonder and glory of that which He has done in Jesus Christ in the life and soul of a believer.

And then turn forward again to chapter 6 and verse 12, speaking now of the armor of God that we are to put on for our struggle. He says in verse 12, it's "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." We live out our lives as the children of God, as adopted children of God, in the heavenly places. There's something of a grand sweep then of that which God is doing. In the cosmic world God blesses us and blesses us not just in the way that we can see and in the way that we can touch and in the way that we can feel, but it's a blessing that transcends this world. It's a blessing that has its goal in the world to come. It's a blessing that transcends the age in which we live. It's a blessing that was determined in eternity and that has as its goal our eternity and eternal life with Jesus Christ. That's the realm of this blessing.

II. The relationship of blessing.

But, secondly, there is the relationship of this blessing. And Paul tells us that we are blessed: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," in relationship to Jesus, in communion with God's only begotten Son. Every aspect of this blessing in all of its wonder, in all of its glory, comes as a consequence of what Jesus Christ has done and as a consequence of our having been brought into union and fellowship with Jesus Christ. It's impossible to think of any aspect of our salvation without thinking of our union with Jesus Christ. It's in Christ.

Adoption is a relationship with God the Father, but it's accomplished and realized through the Son, through Jesus Christ, and brought into actuality by the Holy Spirit. As is every blessing that comes to us, it comes to us because of what Jesus Christ has done.

But also because of the fact that by the grace of God we've been brought into union with Jesus Christ. Think of those astonishing words of Jesus in the upper room in John 15, "I am the vine and you are the branches." And all of our fruit bearing comes as a consequence that we are in union with the vine. He is the head and we are the body. There's a wonderful statement that Paul makes: opening chapter of his epistle to the Romans in chapter 1 and verse 4, and he's speaking about Jesus Christ. And he says about Jesus Christ "that He was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." There's a sense in

which at the resurrection something of the reality of Jesus' sonship was declared. Now He always was the Son of God. He wasn't declared to be the Son of God at the resurrection. He was declared to be the Son of God *with power*. During his earthly life, He was the Son of God, but He was the Son of God *veiled*. He was the Son of God "in a low condition," to quote our *Catechism*. He was the Son of God incarnate and in human flesh and in frailty and in weakness and in bodily suffering; but after the resurrection taken to the right hand of God. He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It's in union with that Jesus that we now enjoy communion here this evening. We are in union, we are in communion with Jesus who sits at God's right hand. All the blessings that come to us flow to us through the King who sits enthroned at God's right hand.

I want you to think about that: that we have union with Jesus, that we have spiritual communion with the Son of God declared to be the Son of God with power. I think that says something to us at extremely deep levels of our being. Don't you think? That we are communing as the adopted children of God as those who are receiving the manifold blessings of God. It comes to us by virtue of Jesus with whom we are in union.

III. Those who were dead in sins are now recipients of this blessing

And then, thirdly, there are the recipients of this blessing. You notice how Paul says "He has blessed us" in verse 3; "He chose us" in verse 4; "He predestined us" in verse 5; "To the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed *on us*" in verse 6? Who are the recipients of this blessing? Who are the "us"? Those who he describes in chapter 2 as once having been dead in trespasses and in sins whom God has quickened and made alive and made alive with Christ and raised us up and made us to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. He's talking about Christians. He's talking about those who, in the language of John, have been "born again of the Spirit of God"; those who have received mercy, the recipients of these blessings of which adoption is one, of those who have received mercy. "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

IV. The riches of this blessing.

And, fourthly, the riches of this blessing. If the realm of this blessing is the heavenly places, if the relationship of this blessing is our union with Jesus, and if the recipients of this blessing are those who have received mercy; the riches of the blessing-look at verse 3-"every spiritual blessing." Every spiritual blessing.

Does that mean every blessing that you can think of? No. It means every

blessing that *He* can think of. Because we are recipients of blessing that we haven't even realized, that we haven't even begun to appreciate. The blessing of God and the extent of that blessing needs to be defined in terms of the eternal wisdom of God. Wasn't it Al Joleson who used to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet"? And we say it too. You've been quickened; you've been regenerated; you've been born again; you've been justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone; you've been adopted into the household and family of God; you've been brought into union and communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ; you have been made an heir and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit resides in you as the down payment and guarantee of that which is to come, but you haven't seen anything yet. It's just the beginning; it's just a foretaste; it's just an hors d'oeuvre. That's all it is.

V. The result of this blessing.

But the result of this blessing, which is where I want to get to. Not only the realm of this blessing and the relationship of this blessing and the recipients of this blessing and the riches of this blessing but the result of this blessing. And look at how he puts it in verse 6: "To the praise of the glory of His grace." He's talking about the blessing of free and sovereign election. Yes, that's one of the blessings. You balk at it at your peril. If it hadn't been for God's choosing we would still be dead in trespasses and in sins. If it wasn't for the sovereign hand of God upon us bringing us out of darkness and into His marvelous light, we would still be perishing sinners. The blessing of election, the blessing of redemption, and the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, the blessing of the gift of God's spirit.

But verse 5: "He predestined us to adoption as sons." That's the goal: that's what God had in mind. What God is displaying in His manifold wisdom is the blessing of adoption: that you and I, fallen sons of Adam by nature, have been brought by the grace of God and the mercy of God into a living relationship with Jesus Christ so that He is the elder brother in the family of God of which God the Father is our father. So that we may come before our Heavenly Father and say, "Abba, Abba."

I'll never forget walking down the streets of Jerusalem. Of course I knew it. Of course I knew that little children call their fathers in the Hebrew tongue "Abba." Of course I knew that, but seeing and hearing little children pull on their father's sleeve in the streets of Jerusalem and say, "Abba, Abba, Abba" brought it home to me once again: the relationship that God by His grace has brought us into through faith in Jesus Christ. That this great God, this sovereign God, this electing God, this predestinating God, this God who made the heavens and the earth, this creating God, this God of providence, this God who knows no bounds, this God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; this God who sits upon the circle of the Earth and all the inhabitants are as but a drop in the bucket; this God is our Father. He is our Father, I say. "I'm the child of a King. I'm the child of

a King.”

Samuel Davies, of Welsh origin, founder of Southern Presbyterianism, sent to Hanover County in Virginia to preach to converted Presbyterians during the Great Awakening, wrote that wonderful hymn. It's in our Trinity Hymnal. “Great God of wonders, all Thy ways are matchless, godlike, and divine; *but* the fair glories of Thy grace more godlike and unrivaled shine.” It's in the grace of God that the glory of God is revealed. And that's why Paul says here that the result of this blessing ought to be (verse 6) “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” You want to see the glory of God? Then look into that heart of yours which by grace has been transformed and made new and made alive in Jesus Christ, that once you were dead, but by the grace of Jesus Christ He has made you to sit in heavenly places in Jesus Christ.

You may be sitting here tonight. You may be sitting here on these old, wooden pews that speak of history and tradition, but you know in reality your hearts and your souls are soaring into heavenly places, mingling your voices and prayers with angels and archangels and seraphim and cherubim. That's the reality of it. That's the glory of it. “Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have it entered into the heart of man what God hath prepared for those that love Him.”

Why am I what I am as a Christian? There's only one answer: the grace of God. Why am I a child of the King tonight in this sin-sick world of ours with all of the fears of terrorism and violence and death? I'm the child of a King. And why am I a child of the King? The grace of God, the sheer grace of God. Are you giving Him the glory tonight? Our chief end is to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. And that enjoyment, that soul happiness, comes from magnifying the grace of God that has brought us, Paul says, into a relationship whereby we are the children of God. We are the children of God.

Well this fall we're going to examine this doctrine in all of its multifaceted nature. And may God lead us, you and I, to praise Him, to glorify Him as we ought. We're going to sing now a hymn, #465, “Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord.” Let's stand to sing.

Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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