

Ephesians 1:3-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/eph/eph-1/ephesians-13-6/>

Paul explains how the Trinity of God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) are all at work in saving believers from sin. God the Father chose believers before creation itself, setting them apart for the purpose of walking blamelessly in His ways. Jesus Christ the Son made this adoption possible by dying on the cross. If we live lives of faithful witness, we can inherit great reward, just as Jesus did.

In chapter 1, *Paul* unpacks how the three persons of the Trinity play a role in the various tenses of our salvation (past, present, and future). The Trinity is made up of *God the Father*, *God the Son (Jesus Christ)*, and *God the Holy Spirit*. There is one God, and three persons. Paul talks about three different aspects of how all the persons of the Trinity are at work in our lives. The past tense of our salvation is our justification before God, which is our right standing in the sight of God because of *Jesus Christ*. The present tense of our salvation is that the *Holy Spirit* is at work in our lives daily to conform us to the image of *Jesus Christ*. This present tense of our salvation is also called our sanctification (our spiritual maturation of imitating Christ in our earthly life). The future tense of our salvation is that we will be delivered from the presence of sin when we dwell in a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The Father selected us, the Son sacrificed Himself for us, and the Holy Spirit seals us and lives in us as a guarantee of our future entrance into God's presence when we die and pass to the next life.

Paul begins by praising and elevating *God the Father* first and foremost, while explaining His role in the life of the believer. As the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, He is the giver of *every spiritual blessing* that we have. He *has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*. However, God the Father's blessing upon us is given to us *in Christ*. It is through Jesus that we gain these immense treasures.

From eternity past, *God the Father* chose us to be saved in *Christ: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him*. God is sovereign, and all things are determined by Him. As we progress through Ephesians, we will see that Paul will exhort these believers to make good choices. Further, scripture asserts that each person chooses whether to believe, and bears responsibility for their choices. To us, this is a paradox. In his letter to the Romans, Paul asserts God's sovereignty in Romans 9:14-20, then shortly after exhorts the Roman believers to make good choices, because that will determine who they become (Romans 12:1-21) and will determine their rewards in the next life (Romans 14:12). This paradox is resolved through faith. As Paul states:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be the glory forever*.

Amen.”
(Romans 11:33-35)

We can hold the tension of this paradox because we trust in the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ* (Additionally, see the [Founding Paradox Tough Topics article](#)).

Before creation, before the *world* was given a *foundation*, God chose *us*. God is intricately involved in our salvation and restoration from before time began. But God chose us for something specific, so that *we would be holy and blameless before Him*. God knew that, despite creating humankind in His image and placing us in the perfect environment (the Garden of Eden), we would still choose rebellion and fall away from Him (Genesis 3:6). We would then require redemption before we could be *holy and blameless*.

We are made *holy and blameless* in God’s sight through believing in Jesus (John 3:14-16). When we believe on Jesus, looking upon Him nailed to the cross, we are born anew, and receive His full payment for sin, which was also nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). This has been God’s mode of operation throughout scripture, as Paul asserts in his letter to the Romans, that Abraham believed God and he was reckoned as righteous, *holy and blameless*, in God’s sight because of his faith (Romans 4:2-3; Genesis 15:6). This is the past tense of our salvation from sin.

There is also a future tense. Because of God’s *love* for His creation, He *predestined us to adoption as sons*. The first step in this plan to adopt us *as sons* is for us to be given the grace of *redemption through His blood* which is received by faith—the past tense and beginning place of our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Through the free gift of Jesus we are born anew into a right relationship with God, and are freed from the penalty of sin (John 3:14-16). This is the new birth. But in the Roman culture, to become a *son* was to be given responsibility to manage family affairs. This required the child to go through an *adoption* ceremony, in order to become a *son*. By analogy, believers must go through the sanctification (present tense) process in order to develop the capacity to bear the responsibility of a *son*. In this respect, our future reward depends on our current faithfulness (Colossians 3:23).

Likely Paul is referring to an *adoption* custom which his Roman audience would have been familiar with as a coming-of-age ceremony. There were two stages of this Roman *adoption* tradition:

- 1) To be placed as a “son” at age fourteen, with voting rights, then;
- 2) to be placed as a mature son at age twenty-five, with property rights.

The analogy might be applied to believers in this manner: 1) All believers have “voting” rights upon being born again into God’s family. This is because they are free to choose to follow either sin/flesh or righteousness/Spirit (Romans 6:16-19; Galatians 5:16); 2) Only those believers who suffer with Christ will have the reward of “property rights” in the world to come, gaining the reward of receiving an inheritance in His Kingdom to reign with Him (Colossians 3:23, Romans 8:17b; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:21).

This differs from the typical American way of thinking about adoption, which often refers to the moment a child is legally received into a new family. But it is consistent with the ancient tradition of superior kings adopting loyal servants into their royal family as a reward for faithful service. This form of adoption-as-reward is what is described in Hebrews 1, where there is an elaborate description of Jesus being adopted as a “Son” over all humanity, largely quoted from the Psalms. Jesus was clearly already God’s Son, from eternity past, so this was not a beginning of His relationship with His Father. Rather, this ceremony is the crowning of Jesus as king, a Son over all creation, as a reward for His faithful service to His Father (Matthew 28:18; Revelation 3:21; Philippians 2:5-11). It is in this sense that God adds *adoption as sons* to the list of amazing blessings we gain *through Jesus Christ*.

God’s original design for humans was to be the stewards over all creation (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 8). But it appears that when humans fell Satan was reinstated (John 12:31;16:11). Jesus restored humanity to its proper place, having authority over the earth. Now Jesus also has been given authority over all things (Matthew 28:18). Through Jesus, humanity can be restored to our original purpose, to rule over creation in harmony with God, by means of *adoption as sons*, granting us the authority to graduate from being children to being *sons*. And reigning over creation. This is likely why our *adoption as sons* is described as being *through Jesus Christ to Himself*. When we join Jesus in reigning with Him, we are attached to Jesus in accomplishing His purpose to reign over all things. Paul will later describe this relational binding *to Himself* as a mysterious form of marriage (Ephesians 5:32).

It was *through* God’s true Son, *Jesus Christ*, that this *adoption* was made possible. Jesus has created the path for humans to be restored to their original purpose ([see commentaries on Hebrews 2:5-13](#) and [Psalm 8](#)). Again, Paul attributes this to God’s *love* for us, *according to the kind intention of His will*. God’s original purpose for humans was thwarted by sin, but now God, through Jesus Christ, has willed to provide a path for humans to be restored to that purpose. This requires their relationship to God to be restored (to be born again). This applies to anyone who believes (John 3:14-16). To be fully restored also requires our *adoption as sons*, to join Jesus in reigning over the earth. This applies to those who overcome as Jesus overcame, who will receive this great reward (Revelation 3:21).

God did not have to save humankind, a race that has continued to reject Him. He would have been fully justified to leave humanity in ruin. But He has provided a means for humans to be fully restored. He did so out of *love* and *kind intention* toward humanity. The result of this *adoption as sons*, providing a means to redeem humanity to its original purpose, is *the praise of the glory of His grace*. *Grace* means favor. God’s favor is never required, as no one can obligate God. God gave His favor to humans because of His love for them (John 3:15). *Glory* refers to the essence of someone or something being clearly observed (1 Corinthians 15:40-41). The fact that God so loved the world that He sent His son to redeem the world demonstrates the incredible *glory* of God, His essence as a loving creator. His restoration of humans is, in and of itself, a means of *praise* to this amazing aspect of His character.

The fact that God freely chose to restore humans through His great sacrifice of Jesus demonstrates to any observer the *love* and *kind intention* He has towards humanity. Any observer

who sees this benevolent intent of God should *praise* the amazing reality of God's *love, kind intention, and grace* toward us.

God also *freely bestowed on us* this incredible *grace* (or favor) of being made *holy and blameless* in His sight *in the Beloved*, and being destined to *adoption as sons*, that we might be restored fully to our original purpose. The *Beloved* here refers to *Jesus Christ, God the Son* (Matthew 3:17). It is God's favor upon us that allows us to have the amazing opportunity to be born into His family, and to choose to be a faithful witness, and gain the great reward of reigning with Him as *sons*.

When we walk as faithful witnesses, we have the incredible privilege of having the name of our Lord Jesus being glorified in us. The word *glory* is translated from the Greek "doxa," meaning the character or essence of someone or something being observed (1 Corinthians 15:40-41). So by adopting us, *the glory of God's grace* is made evident, that the nature of His favor can be clearly seen, His *love and kind intention*. This favor is *freely bestowed on us*, given to us without price or requirement, and it was in the *Beloved*, the Son of God, who laid down His life for us to make this *adoption* possible.

The simple message of the Gospel is that we are accepted into God's family through having enough faith to look on Jesus, hoping to be delivered from the deadly venom of sin (John 3:14-15). It is a gift *freely bestowed*, given to those who simply believe in its truth. This acceptance is unconditional. Now as members of His family, we have the opportunity to accept the responsibility to serve others in love, and overcome temptation and the flesh. When we do so, we gain the immense reward of being adopted as sons, even as Jesus was rewarded (Revelation 3:21).

Biblical Text

³ 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, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.