

Finding Our Identity in Jesus Series

Blessed with Adoption (Ephesians 1:5-6)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Blessed with Adoption

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Attending an Adoption

1. As I sat in the courtroom feeling joy and excitement in the same space where many negative emotions are experienced, I realized how wonderful the legal power of adoption is. I witnessed children being placed in a home with parents who loved and wanted them. They would be in an environment that was healthier for the children than what their biological parents provided. The courtroom was filled with people who wanted to be part of this happy occasion.
2. A happy occasion in a courtroom seems to be a rare exception, even when a ruling is in a person's favor. Typically, the law only gets involved when something bad happens. Jesus assumed the most common experience most people have of a courtroom is when they have done something wrong and are deserving of punishment (Mt. 5:25-26). Aside from jury duty, the average person only goes to court when they are forced to when they are on the wrong side of the law somehow—perhaps due to a ticket or driving violation. As I sat in the courtroom, I wondered how many cases and decisions had an overwhelmingly positive response and outcome.
3. Adoption is a legal act in which an individual changes families in the sight of the law. Through adoption, parental rights and privileges change. Through adoption, the rights and privileges of the children change. Many practical elements of an adopted child's life are impacted by adoption; the location of where a person lives, the type of visitations that take place, meetings with social services or child protective services, and the household rules that are to be followed are all impacted by adoption.

B. The apostle Paul uses the imagery of the Roman legal system regarding adoption to help people understand what happens in their relationship with Jesus. As children of God, we are legally adopted into God's spiritual family through which we receive our family inheritance. Being exposed to and understanding this truth becomes a source of comfort and security for us as children of God.

C. Living a healthy Christian life that is not based on performance and effort requires us to operate within the critical truths communicated in Ephesians 1:5-6 regarding our identity as a child of God. In this passage, we learn what the natural nature and tone our relationship and interactions with God have as a child of His. Those who fail to accept what God says about our relationship with Him as one of His children carry unnecessary, crippling, and burdensome weights in their pursuit of God. They end up running toward Jesus with ankle weights, a weighted rucksack, and dumbbells in their hands.

II. Blessed with Adoption

A. Children of God are blessed with every good gift God wants us to have in this life, and we are provided everything we need for life and godliness. This includes the blessing of holiness. God generously gives us a life of meaning so that we can live for an eternal purpose and rewards by serving and worshipping Him. As disciples, we are set apart from those who do not know God

so that we can do what God wants us to do. As an aspect of our holiness, we also become blameless by resisting and overcoming any spiritual and moral faults that we have using the tools and resources given to us by Jesus. Since we are a child of God, God works in our lives to shape us into a morally upright person through His power. Our identity as a child of God is to be holy and blameless as the pure people who belong to God. We will now continue our list of spiritual blessings given to the children of God through their attachment to Jesus.

B. The next spiritual blessing from God given to the children of God is articulated this way:

In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons *and daughters* through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He favored us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:5-6)

C. To feel the weight of the encouragement and comfort the apostle Paul is offering to the church, we must realize the gravity of God's plan for us personally and the course of our life as a child of God ("In love He predestined us", v. 5). God chose us and planned for us to become a child of His, even before He created our world. You and I are not an afterthought to God; we are a critically important part of His plan for His creation. God thought about us individually and planned the course of our life before He began His act of creating our world! God has been thinking about us individually for a long time. God's thoughts about His children are truly precious as David claimed (Ps. 139:16-17).

D. Just as God thoughtfully and carefully planned what He would create and how He would create it (Job 38:4-11), He did the same for us and our lives. Every person who becomes a child of God is part of an eternal plan of God that God thought up long before we ever existed. God planned first and created second. God created a plan for our life, including how He will draw us to Jesus to make us a child of His, how He will work in our lives as a child of His, and how our life as a child of His will be rewarded.¹ Our entire journey as a child of God, from start to finish, was preplanned by God.² Our spiritual status and success as a child of God ultimately depends on God and not us. While we may fail from time to time, God does not (2 Tim. 2:11-13). Our confidence and comfort come from our dependence on and trust in God—not our own abilities to be obedient to God. While we participate in our journey with God, its durability and destiny are determined by God (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

E. Most of us have probably experienced a situation in which someone else put time, thoughtfulness, and effort into planning an event for us—perhaps for a birthday. An event takes place for us that was prepared ahead of time. When this happens, we feel loved and cared for because another person had us in mind and sacrificed for our benefit. God did this on a level not possible by any other person. God didn't plan us to become a child of His a few days, a week, months, or even a year in advance. He planned our spiritual birthday lifetimes ago.

¹ In Ephesians 1:5 it is clear that God planned for us to become a child of God, Jesus said that God the Father initiates His plan as the Father draws people to Jesus (Jn. 6:44, 65, Rm. 8:30), and Jesus confirms that the kingdom we will inherit as a child of God has been prepared for us before the foundation of the world (Mt. 25:34). Our entire journey as a child of God, from start to finish, was planned by God before we were born.

² Predestination means to determine something ahead of time before it's occurrence. Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Ephesians 1:5 "predestined"

- F. Unfortunately, some people take what is intended by God to be a source of joy, comfort, security, and confidence for us and turn it into a point of confusion, frustration, or anger. Mentioning God choosing us and predestining us to become children of God can quickly send people's minds toward the in-church debate about two different systems of theology: reformed vs. Arminian.³ How a person understands and explains the way God's choice and predestination work is irrelevant to what we are talking about here. We're not entering the longstanding debate between these two ways of understanding what is being talked about.
- G. Both sides agree that God chooses us and He predestines us because God's word clearly teaches both ideas. Election is a divine relation from God, not a human speculation.⁴ Where you take these truths from here is up to you. Neither view is being promoted, and if a person starts resisting the idea of election and predestination, we are missing the entire point being made by Paul. Paul is clearly and undeniably saying that God chooses and predestines as a fact. No claim is being made about how this works or how it should be understood. Neither the reformed or the Arminian view is being argued for. God's power and control over our lives (called God's sovereignty) is a blessing from God. It is intended to help us see how special we are to God, how much He loves us, and help us experience comfort and peace with God. Let's not get distracted from this point.
- H. God decided and determined to make us a child of His ("to adoption as sons and daughters", v. 5). Because God adopts us through Jesus, we are accepted by God as His children.⁵ Those who believe in Jesus are accepted by God as God's children.⁶ When disciples receive the Holy Spirit, they enter and experience a new father-son relationship (Rm. 8:15).⁷ Adoption deals with and fixes our problematic relational status with God.⁸ As children, your name has been written in God's heavenly record keeping, the Book of Life, since the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8, 17:8). God has been thinking about us for a very long time because of the depth of love He has for us!⁹ God planned from eternity past to transfer us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His Son (Col 1:13).
- I. Based on the decision made by the Father, each member of the Trinity works in our life in such a way to lead us to becoming a child of God so we choose to accept Jesus as the source of our forgiveness. As spiritually adopted children of God, the Holy Spirit works in our life in a way that

³ This theological debate started in the seventeen century with John Calvin and Jacob Arminius and has continued up until today.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, [God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians](#), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 37.

⁵ Glenn Graham, [An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 25.

⁶ William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1024.

⁷ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, [Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 381.

⁸ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, [A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 540.

⁹ We need to be careful to think rightly about God's actions and motivations toward us. God does not love us because we are so lovable but because He is so loving (Rm. 5:8, Dt. 7:6-9, 9:4-5). God doesn't love us because we deserve it or have earned it. He loves us because He is forgiving and kind. God loves us because He decided and intends to love us, not because of any admirable quality we possess. God sets His affection on those He chooses (Dt. 10:15).

results in us being drawn to Jesus so that we accept Him as the person He is.¹⁰ We freely choose to believe in Jesus because God the Father has decided to make us a child of His, and He works in us to make that decision happen. The security and comfort comes in knowing that God is the One who is the initiator and manager of this entire process of being a child of God.

- J. In all this, God is delighted and filled with pleasure to work in your life this way (“according to the good pleasure of His will”, v. 5). When God made the decision to adopt us individually as a child of His, He felt delight in making that decision.¹¹ The decision to make you a child of His brought joy to the heart of God. This decision brings God pleasure. We are created for life in fellowship with God, as children with the Father, and this relationship brings God happiness.¹² When God decides to bring a person from a hostile relationship into one of acceptance, He feels intense satisfaction.¹³
- K. Have you ever decided and performed a good action for another person that made you feel good? God has the same experience. The first time God felt joy and satisfaction was the moment He decided to make you a child of His in- eternity past. He also delights in every action He performs to bring His decision into reality.
- L. The main idea that is being communicated here is that every child of God is safe and secure in the eternal plan God has for us personally. God is watching over us carefully and working in our lives to carry out the spiritual good He has decided and planned for us from eternity past. Now, during our lifetime, God is hard at work making sure the good spiritual work He planned to do in us is being completed as our lives play out.
- M. As a child of God, you have a spiritual family that is far better than any biological family (Mt. 12:46-50). If your biological family is a mess, you have a spiritual family in which you can be loved and receive care from your Heavenly Father and your brothers and sisters in the church. Even if you are a single person, you are part of a family—the family of God. Even if you are an orphan who never knew your biological parents, you are part of a close-knit family. Even if your spiritual enemies are members of your own biological family, you are connected to a better family who welcomes you with open arms. Even if you have moved across the country away from your biological family, you can build family-like relationships with those who belong to God. Even if you are unable to have children of your own, you can care for and invest in the children of your spiritual family.
- N. As children of God, we are safe and secure in the plan God has for us. God’s election of us is not intended to be a paradox that troubles our mind and confuses us.¹⁴ God communicates His process of making us a child of His through adoption so that we will praise His gracious actions toward us. While our interest can be peaked and we may want to learn more about how God

¹⁰ This is referred to in the Bible as calling. God calls us to be a child of His in the sense that He works in our lives to bring us into the kingdom of His Son.

¹¹ Glenn Graham, *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 27.

¹² Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 56.

¹³ Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 20.

¹⁴ Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1991), 16.

works in people's lives, we can't forget the reason why God explains how He works in us—to promote our affection and worship of Him (1 Jn. 3:1). If our learning about God doesn't naturally bring about deeper love for God, there is something seriously wrong with how we are learning. As we learn from the Bible, we might be focusing on the wrong elements if we aren't regularly paying attention to how wonderful and good God is in everything He does.

- O. Knowing that God has a pre-determined plan for our lives spiritually should lead us to put even more effort into following that plan (2 Pet. 1:10). Rather than causing us to feel like we can take our hands off the wheel and relax, or even become spiritually lazy because we feel safe, understanding God's work in us causes us to be motivated to cooperate with God to become the person He is creating us to be. Our desire is to do the actions God has planned for us to do (Eph. 2:10). As we follow the example of Jesus, we want to fulfill the course God the Father has set before us in a faithful and obedient way.

III. Blessed with Favor

- A. Once we are accepted by God as a child of His through adoption, this relational status determines the nature of our relationship with God:
 - with which He favored us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:6)
- B. As a child of God, we have the favor of God on us ("He favored us", v. 6). God has an attitude of affection and kindness toward His children because of their attachment to Jesus. To be favored is to freely bestow beneficial goodwill on someone.¹⁵ God's natural posture and disposition toward His children is one of favor, blessing, and generosity.¹⁶ As disciples, we can live the Christian life confidently assured of God's affection toward us.
- C. The only other place in the New Testament where this term is used is Luke 1:28 where Mary is greeted by the angel Gabriel, "Greetings, favored one!" If God appeared to us the way He did to Mary, we would receive the same type of greeting that Mary received! As simple and straightforward as it is to refer to the Bible's claim that every child of God is favored by God, it is a wholly difficult task to convince disciples to think about themselves this way and live as if God's favor rests on them. While claiming to have the favor of God is not complex, it is extremely challenging to embrace.
- D. Perhaps the most effective way to convince the children of God that God favors them is to read some of the many statements of God telling us how He thinks and feels about His spiritually adopted children. Becoming familiar with the robust images and ways that God describes His heart toward us, and hearing Him repeat Himself many times, will cause us to feel the weight of how much God favors us as His children. We are going to read and take note of what God has to say about how He feels about His people.
- E. The nature and tone of our relationship with God as a child of God is graphically described in the following list of texts. Jesus affirms the fact that God the Father loves us because we love Jesus (Jn. 16:27).¹⁷ As disciples, we don't have to earn God's love; He has already generously given it to us, and continues to do so throughout our relationship with Him.

¹⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Ephesians 1:6 "favored"

¹⁶ 2 Samuel 7:14-15

¹⁷ Proverbs 15:9

- F. God is compassionate with His children and doesn't interact with them the way their sins deserve (Ps. 103:10-14). If we think God is eager and ready to punish us every time we disobey Him, we do not view our relationship with God Biblically. As a child of God, our Heavenly Father never treats us as we deserve for our sin. Even though God disciplines and corrects us for our good, He never punishes us to the full extent that we deserve for our rebellion against Him. He is always merciful and gracious to His children.
- G. We are precious to God—a treasure (Isa. 43:4). God cares about us, and we are valuable to Him. Because we are precious to God, He focuses His attention on us as He watches over our lives (1 Sam. 2:9, Ps. 31:23, 145:20). As God focuses His attention on us, He never sleeps or takes a break (Ps. 121:4). Our loving Father, God watches over our soul (Pr. 24:12).
- H. God rejoices over us as a groom does his bride (Isa. 62:5). Because of us God experiences the emotion of great happiness and pleasure.¹⁸ As children of God, we make Him happy! God is not perpetually disappointed with us. He delights in the smallest steps we take toward Him. As children of God, we bring joy to His heart (Zeph. 3:17). God delights in us (Pr. 11:20).
- I. Even when we fail and sin against Him, God still yearns for us (Jer. 31:20). God has a desire for us as someone who is not present.¹⁹ God enjoys being around us and spending time with us. Our Heavenly Father likes us, even in the midst of having to confront and correct us. These postures God has toward us will never change, and they will be there for us when we are old and grey (Isa. 46:3-4). We will never be abandoned by God (Isa. 49:14-16).
- J. All these descriptions and images capture what it means to be favored by God. As children of God, our Father regularly and consistently extends His goodwill and kindness to us. This is how our relationship with God operates. At the same time, it is true that we can grow in and increase the favor God has for us and extends to us through our obedience (Lk. 2:40, 2:52). The Christian life begins with the least amount of God's favor, but perpetually increases over time as we grow in proper attitudes and actions.²⁰
- K. How do you think God feels about you? Disappointed? Discouraged? Angry? Harsh? Critical? Overbearing? If we are not convinced God delights in us and takes pleasure in us, we do not yet understand who we are in Jesus. As children of God, we must become convinced and live in the fact that God favors and delights in us. Once we are persuaded that we have a warm and friendly relationship with God, everything changes about our pursuit of Him. Stop living the Christian life wondering if God likes you. He does. He's already told us many times this is the case. Trust that God is telling you the truth about your relationship with Him through His word. If you were convinced that Jesus desires to spend time with you more than any other person in this world, what difference would this make in your life?
- L. How would you describe the tone of your relationship with God? Warm and friendly? Cold and distant? As we've seen, God yearns to be the person we are closest to in this world. He is the most loving, kind, caring, strong, patient, forgiving, and gracious person we will ever encounter.

¹⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Isaiah 62:5 “rejoices”

¹⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Jeremiah 31:20 “yearns”

²⁰ Exodus 20:6, 33:13, Psalm 147:11, Proverbs 3:3-4, 8:33-35, 12:2, 1 Peter 2:19-20

Our Heavenly Father is never mean, harsh, overly demanding, rude, or destructive with us. As we relate to God, it is the perfect relationship our soul yearns for.

- M. Yes, God still wants us to be growing and to keep working hard at clearing up any disobedience or immoral behavior still hanging on in our lives, but His general attitude and tone of interacting with us as His child is one of favor and blessing. God's soul has positive heart attitudes toward us because of Jesus. Even God's discipline of us is done with a loving feel (Heb. 12:7-11). God deeply cares about us and does what is good for us because of the deep affection He has for us. Knowing about God's affection should not result in spiritual laziness or excuse disobedience, but it should motivate us even more to live a life that is pleasing to God.
- N. Here is a wonderful summary statement communicating God's attitude and feelings toward us:

⁴For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will glorify the lowly with salvation.
(Ps. 149:4)

IV. Conclusion

- A. As a child of God, we are blessed with adoption and accepted with open arms by God. God welcomes us into His spiritual family and acts as our loving Father. We move out of the courtroom relating to God as our Judge and move into His living room relating to God as our Father. The dynamics of a healthy parent-child relationship are the new tone of the way disciples relate to God.
- B. In addition to being part of God's spiritual family, disciples also receive the favor of God. We interact with God in a healthy and loving relationship as our perfect Heavenly Father. God has positive attitudes and dispositions toward us, which motivate Him to perform loving and beneficial actions on our behalf. God delights in us and rejoices over us as a groom does His bride.