
The Book of Ephesians

Chapter 1:4-5

Ministry Reading

Opening Reading -- Ephesians 1:4-5

Ephesians 1:4-5

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

God and Father: Verses 4 and 5 Compared

It has been observed that verses 4 and 5 answer respectively to the two words God and Father in verse 3. There is a reason why verse 3 says 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' and not simply 'God.' God, considered as such, has to do with the nature and character of the life He has given us: that we should be before Him holy and without blame. Father has to do with the privileges of relationship -- the son's place before the Father. Verse 4, accordingly, has to do with our character before God: 'holy and without blame before him in love.' Verse 5 has to do with the place we have in relationship to Him as Father: the adoption of children, the position of sonship.

In verse 4, then, it is God in His sovereignty who chooses us in Christ -- this has to do with nature and character. In verse 5, it is the Father who marks us out

beforehand for a particular privilege and relationship: sonship, a place before Himself.

Before the Foundation of the World: The Church's Unique Place

Verse 4 says we were chosen 'in him before the foundation of the world.' This expression is of the greatest significance. It is always worth keeping in mind that God has two peoples before Him. Israel's place is connected with the expression 'from the foundation of the world' -- because Israel's blessings are earthly, and God established them by covenant in connection with the world and with history. But that which is heavenly is from before the foundation of the world -- before the creation ever existed. Our place was established then.

Matthew 25:34 illustrates the distinction clearly:

Matthew 25:34

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

That is not the language of the church. The kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world is an earthly kingdom, with earthly blessing. To recognize the difference between 'from' and 'before' the foundation of the world is to preserve a distinction of the greatest importance -- one that is lost when all saints from Adam to the millennium are merged into one entity called 'the Church.' The inevitable result of that merging is always to lower the higher down to the lower. The higher never rises to meet it.

Holy and Without Blame: Character and Conduct

The purpose of God's choosing is stated: 'that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.' The words 'holy' and 'without blame' may be

distinguished: holy has to do with character, without blame with conduct. And the sphere in which we stand before Him is love. It was love that motivated God in all of this.

Some have supposed that God, in His omniscience, foresaw who would turn out to be holy and without blame, and on that basis chose them in advance. But that is not what the passage says. It says He chose us in order that we should be holy and without blame -- not because He foresaw that we would be. The choosing comes first; the holiness and blamelessness flow from it. We are not chosen if we make the grade, nor because we make the grade. We are chosen, and it is His choice to make us holy and without blame through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Arminian position fails to reckon adequately with man's condition by nature: there is nothing in fallen man from which holiness could arise. God implants a new nature -- we become partakers of the divine nature, which means we partake of the moral qualities of God, His holiness. That is an endowment from outside, not a development from within.

Individual Election, Not Corporate

A point of real importance: the choosing of the church in Christ is always individual in Scripture, never corporate. Israel's national placement and adoption are corporate -- the nation as such is dealt with. But the church is not corporately chosen in Christ. It is individuals who are chosen, each one individually the subject of this sovereign operation of God. There is no such thing as a corporate choosing of the church.

Those who hold to the heavenly calling of the church and the distinction between the earthly and heavenly peoples of God have always been clear and emphatic on this point. When Israel's national adoption and the church's individual sonship are distinguished, a great many beautiful things in Scripture become clear that are otherwise obscured by lumping them together.

John 10: The Fold, the Sheep, and the One Flock

The Lord's words in John 10 about the sheep, the fold, and the one flock deserve careful attention in this connection. The fold is Judaism; the Lord's own sheep were within it. But verse 4 tells us that he leads his own sheep out:

John 10:4

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Moses and David and Jeremiah were not led out in this way. But those Jewish persons who were truly His just before and after the cross -- James and John and Peter -- were led out from the fold of Judaism. With them He united others: Gentile believers, Cornelius and Timothy and those who have believed in every age since. These together form one flock with one Shepherd. The saying that 'there shall be one flock' does not mean that Abraham and Moses are merged with Gentile believers of the present day into a single undifferentiated mass. It means that Jewish and Gentile believers of this present dispensation are united into one flock -- which could not have been said or done before the cross.

John 11 and the Children of God Scattered Abroad

John 11 provides a complementary truth. There it is said that the Lord Jesus died not only for the nation, but 'that he might also gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.' Before the cross, there were genuine children of God within Judaism -- but there was no ground provided for them to form a visible, manifested community as such, distinguished from the rest of Israel. The law made no provision for this. One could not separate the children of God from the rest of the nation under the legal economy. The law addressed man in the flesh, under trial -- not the child of God as a child of God.

The cross brought in the basis on which the children of God could be gathered together in one and recognized as a visible community of forgiven ones with a family oneness before God. They could say to one another, your sins are forgiven and mine are too -- we are brothers in the family of God. This was not possible before. The fold figure in John 10 and the gathering of scattered children in John 11 are looking at the same thing from different angles.

John 1:12: The Right to Be Children of God

John 1:12 also belongs here:

John 1:12

But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, to them that believe on his name.

This is not merely saying that a person has the right to be saved. It carries more than that, in keeping with the overall thrust of John's gospel. It has in view the work of the cross providing the basis for the children of God to take and express their place as such -- visibly, manifestly -- which the law did not allow. Before the cross, the law made no distinction between who was a child of God and who was not. A mixed company came up out of Egypt. The word of report was not mixed with faith in the most of them, and God was not pleased with them. But now, the cross having been accomplished, those who believe on the name of the Lord Jesus have the right to take the place of children of God before Him -- and to recognize one another as such.

Malachi 3:16 and the First Resurrection

Malachi 3:16 is a heartwarming and encouraging verse:

Malachi 3:16-17

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.

How precious this is. And yet, for all its warmth, those who feared the Lord and spake together were still scattered abroad, waiting for the foundation to be laid for a visible, manifested community of the people of God. What we have now -- the assembly of God, founded upon the head in heaven and our union with Him -- was not yet in existence. The 'day' of verse 17, when the Lord makes up His jewels, is the millennial day; the Son of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2) is the appearing of Christ in glory for Israel. For us, the corresponding image is the morning star -- a different figure altogether.

When the Lord comes with all His saints, the distinctions of church and Old Testament saints and millennial saints are not always the point of the passage. The first resurrection, for example, is spoken of in Revelation 20 as a class: all the just, the spirits of just men made perfect. They all come with Him. Yet in other scriptures the distinction is very much insisted on. It is a question of discerning what each passage is addressing and not importing distinctions where they are not the subject, nor overlooking them where they are.

Election and Predestination: Person and Place

Election and predestination are often used as if they were synonyms, but they are not. Election has in view the person: God has elected a person. Predestination has in view a place or condition: God has marked out beforehand something for that elected person. Darby renders the word as 'marked out beforehand,' which captures this well. One speaks of the status of the person before God; the other speaks of the place that elect person is brought to. Verse 4 gives us election --

chosen in Him. Verse 5 gives us predestination -- marked out beforehand for a particular relationship and privilege.

Adoption: Receiving the Position of Sonship as a Gift

Darby's note on Galatians 4:5 states it simply and beautifully: 'Adoption is receiving the position of sonship as a gift.' The word translated 'adoption of children' in verse 5 really means sonship -- the mature placement in a son's position before the Father. It is not a bar mitzvah of a child already in the family. It is the gift of a son's position -- with all the privileges that belong to that relationship.

In verse 5 we have things that pertain particularly to the Father. It is the Father who has marked us out beforehand for this relationship. And the heart of God is here. The origin of the giving is in the Father's heart.

To Himself: The Father's House

The phrase 'to himself' at the end of verse 5 is not to be passed over. God has marked us out beforehand for sonship through Jesus Christ -- to himself. The Father has brought sons to Himself. This shows the intimacy of the place He has brought us into.

This connects beautifully with the Lord's words in John 14: 'In my Father's house are many abiding places. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.' That is where He is: the Father's house. And the One who has marked us out beforehand for sonship has brought us to Himself -- to the Father's house. The words 'where I am' appear seven times in John's gospel. They carry a specific force in each place, always looking toward the Lord's going home to the Father. That is His characteristic place. And that is where we will be for all

eternity.

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Lord willing.