

EPHESIANS 1:3-6

INTRODUCTION

In the original Greek verses 3-14 is one long sentence; of course in English we have to break it down into shorter sentences so that it fits the structure of our English language. The whole paragraph is a packed full of praise, for Paul begins by praising God for blessing us with every conceivable blessing which comes to us through God the Father and Jesus Christ his beloved Son. (v. 3)

It is because we are in Christ that is we are in union with Christ that God has blessed us and the nature of these blessings we are told are spiritual. This may simply mean that the Holy Spirit who takes the work of Christ and applies it to the heart of his people applies these blessing to us. Therefore Paul is deliberately telling us that these blessings come from the Triune God. First God the Father is the source of every blessing, which we enjoy. He has blessed us, chosen us adopted us into his family and so on.

However these blessing from the Father only come to us through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ all that we receive comes through him because of our union with him. These blessing are spiritual they are applied to our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit himself. These blessing are spelt out clearly in these verses and we will be looking at them as we go along but I want us to notice that Paul says this blessing is in the heavenlies or heavenly realms. But what does Paul mean by this phrase, it is a phrase that is used five times in Ephesians but is not used anywhere else. The word heaven is used in the Scriptures in several different ways. It can refer to the sky with its stars and planets etc.

It is used of heaven as the eternal home of God's people but here it has a completely different meaning. Here it means the unseen world of spiritual reality. This is the realm of angels and demons and it is the realm where Christ reigns and rules (1:20). We are blessed in the heavenly realms because these blessings come to us because of our union with Christ; if he is in the heavenlies then we too are with him in spirit if not in body.

We know something of the reality of this heavenly realm here on earth for we know the reality of Christ and his victory in our lives now and we know something of the conflict that takes place in the heavenly realm for it affects us every day (6:12). We struggle every day against the these spiritual forces of evil this is why we are given spiritual armour in order that we might be able to stand against the devil's schemes. But for now I want us just to appreciate all that God had given us in Christ, he has blessed us, which is a past tense in the Greek with every spiritual blessing. No blessing has been withheld from us, of course we have to grow and mature in Christ and we are being transformed in his image and we will be granted deeper experiences of Christ as our relationship develops but we are already in possession of every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Now having stated the general principle Paul moves on to the particulars. What are these blessings in Christ? In the rest of this long paragraph he begins to unfold some of these blessings for us. They relate to the past the present and the future. Let us now look at

1. THE BLESSING OF ELECTION (v 4)

Paul now thinks about that time in eternity when only God existed in the perfection of his being. The world had not been created there was only God and in that pre-creation eternity God had a purpose in his mind to save a people for himself. God chose us before the creation of the world but he did it with Christ at the centre of his purposes for we were chosen in Christ. In God's mind he placed us and Christ together he determined to make us who at this stage did not even exist his beloved children.

He would do this through the redeeming work of his Son on the cross. So before anything was created God had the plan of redemption through Christ in place and he had those of us who are Christians firmly fixed in his mind for his intention was to save us in Christ? So to put his plan into action he chose us in Christ. His purpose in choosing us is so that we would be holy and blameless in his sight.

This of course implies doesn't it that we were unholy and blameworthy before God but because of God's election of us in Christ then we would become holy and blameless. Now this doctrine of election has raised more controversy than any other doctrine in the Scriptures except perhaps the doctrine of atonement.

The problem that we have with the doctrine of election is that we distinctly remember a time when we decided to follow Christ when we chose to repent and believe in Jesus. If that is the case then how is it that we were chosen by God before we chose him? Was my decision to follow Christ not a real decision? The answer to that question is yes it was a real decision you choose Christ freely but behind our human decision there was God's decision to choose us and without that particular decision then we would not have made our decision.

It is because God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world that in time we decided freely to choose Christ for ourselves. God's decision makes our decision possible. Without God's sovereign purpose of election then no one would choose to follow Christ. We are naturally hostile to him, and left to our own devices and decisions we would never think of becoming Christians. But because God has chosen us in Christ he enables us to think about Christ to see sin, as we ought to and to decide to follow Christ as our own personal Saviour and Lord.

Whatever our view on the subject of election we must remember that this doctrine is not an invention of man but it is revealed to us by God. Even if there are so many questions that we find difficult to answer and even if there are questions that we find difficult to cope with (i.e. why does God chose some and not others) we must always remember that election is God's idea and not man's.

To question it, is to question the wisdom of the all-wise God. But this great doctrine is really an incentive to those of us who are Christians to live holy lives; this doctrine is not an excuse for sin.

Some Christians in the past have argued that if I am elected and therefore I am secure in Christ for his purposes must be fulfilled then I don't need to worry about how I live since I am a child of God as my salvation is secure in him. Such reasoning

is false the truth is; the opposite is the case. God has elected us to be holy and blameless in his sight so the evidence that one is elect is that we will seek to be holy and will seek to live blamelessly before God. His election and adoption into his family gives us new desires to live a life pleasing unto God. The effect of God's election is a new heart towards God.

Being born again is the outworking of God's eternal decree to electing us unto salvation. That spiritual regeneration gives us new desires, new will and a new heart for God and the things of God. So holiness and blamelessness are the very things that we now desire. So the argument that we can live as we please because we are secure in Christ does not hold up to the scrutiny of God's word.

The fact that God has elected us in Christ ought to so move us and motivate us so that our whole desire is to live up to our election, to see God's purpose of election fulfilled within us. It is true that this doctrine gives us security for our salvation does not depend upon us but upon God's eternal purposes in Christ. But those purposes do not remove from us the responsibility to live holy and blameless lives before God. The very opposite is the case; his election of us is the very reason and motivation for living holy and blameless lives.

This doctrine of election is not a reason to boast but is in fact a reason for humility. Those of us who are the elect of God have no reason to think that we must be better than others for God chose us but notice that he choose us before the creation of the world, before we even existed before we could do anything good or bad. Therefore our election was not based on merit but on his sovereign choice it is because of his love for us and because of his grace that we are chosen and saved in Christ.

So every time we raise the thought in our minds about how good we are or how pleased God must be with us remember we are what we are because of God's sovereign choice and because of his electing love. So if we are ever tempted to think we are somebody and even as Christians we can think that we are somebody, after all look what I do for the Lord compared to others then we must ponder again the doctrine of election that is sure to humble us and make us truly grateful and thankful to God for his electing purposes towards us.

Another argument used against the doctrine of election is that there is no need of evangelism. If God is going to save his elect people then why should we evangelise he is going to save whom he has chosen anyway. But actually this doctrine is a motivation for evangelism. We evangelise because God commands us to do so and it is disobedience if we fail to do so.

God uses means to fulfil his electing purposes and one of those means is his people who are called to take the gospel into the world. But as we obey this command to evangelise that fact that God has electing purposes is a great motivation. We know that ultimately it does not depend on us to persuade people to be Christians. We also know that people will become Christians through evangelism because God has chosen his people before the creation of the world.

If there was no election then we would become disillusioned in our evangelism, disillusioned with ourselves - am I not explaining the gospel adequately. But election

gives us hope perhaps the person we are witnessing too is one of God's elect people, he or she may be one that God has purposes to save; that ought to encourage us to keep going.

We must believe that God has his elect people here in the Dales it is our task to find them by presenting the gospel to them and when they repent and believe we can say they are one of God elect.

Also when we witness we can become very discouraged because we failed to say this or that or didn't explain this well enough or failed to be bolder in pressing home the claims of Christ. But with the doctrine of election firmly fixed in our minds we can at least comfort ourselves with the truth that ultimately that person's salvation does not depend on me and my witnessing skills and techniques but upon the set purposes of God himself.

But Paul goes on to talk about not only election but also predestination and adoption. So now we want to turn our attention to the:

2. THE BLESSING OF ADOPTION (v 5-6)

In love God predestined us to be adopted as his sons. To predestinate simply means to mark us out. So God marked us out for special attention. In football the opponents might single out a good player in their opponents team and mark him out for special attention. Well God chose us in Christ and marked us out for special attention. He had decided that we were to be saved and as a result we were to be adopted us into his family.

Now we know that adopted children enjoy the same rights and privileges of natural children, they can use the family name they can receive family inheritances and can enjoy the security of belonging to a family. Now by adopting us into his family God is giving us privileges that do not naturally belong to us and responsibilities that we should never have. We receive the privilege of a living relationship with God. The privilege of belonging to his family of being in membership of his church.

We have the privilege of sins forgiven of justification before God and the privilege of the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Of course with these privileges comes the responsibility of living up to our new name, we are children of God therefore we must represent our new family here on earth and must display something of the character of our Father in our lives. We have the responsibility of maintaining a meaningful relationship with the Lord, through study of his word and prayer.

We have the responsibility of maintaining the unity within his family and we are responsible for telling others about the one who has adopted us and brought us into his family. Great privileges and awesome responsibilities indeed.

This adoption into God's family comes to us because God set his love upon us and because it was his will that we should be saved and it brings him great pleasure to adopt us into his family (v 5). Isn't this amazing, that God delights in saving and adopting us into his family. Without his purpose to do so without him willing our salvation and adoption then none of us would be saved. We would still be in our sins and would still be enemies of God and friends of Satan. But God has done all this

for us. Not because of any worth or merit within ourselves but because of Christ. We are adopted through Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus and what he has done for us by dying in our place that God's set purposes of election and adoption become a reality to us.

It is because he has paid the price dealt with sin and has removed the barrier of the wrath of God from us that we are now able to enjoy the privilege of belonging to God's church. Before you moan about the church just remember the church only exists because of God's election and adoption and because of Christ sacrificial work on our behalf. To criticise the church is to indirectly criticise God's purposes and Christ's saving work for us.

The church is God's idea not ours. He thought of it before the creation of the world and he elected us and predestined us to be adopted into his family, to be members of his church and he did so through the sacrificial work of Christ. So please be careful when you criticise the church in general or specific people within our own church for God has elected and adopted us into his family and Christ has paid a great price for us. He did it because he had great pleasure in doing so.

The purpose behind all that God has done for us is found in verse 6. Our salvation, our election and adoption ought to bring praise to God through Jesus Christ. All that we receive comes to us by grace it comes to us freely through Christ therefore as we think about our own salvation and as we think about the church of Jesus Christ and ponder God's electing and saving purposes then we simply ought to bring praise to God for all that he has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the one the Father loved yet he willingly gave him for us and Jesus willingly came for us in order that we could know the reality of God's electing and predestinating purposes in our lives. To God be all the praise and all the glory

Amen