

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Ephesians 1:3-10

Verses 3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms with Christ. Thus he chose us in him before the foundation of the universe to make us holy and unblemished before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Christ to him according to the pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he generously bestowed on us by the one he loved.

This is an exuberant doxological passage, and if verse 13 is included, an act of praise for the holy Trinity. First, God's fatherhood is extolled. He is the **God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** (2Cor 1:3), both the Father of the preexistent Son and the Father of the earthly Jesus. On earth, our Lord Jesus made himself subordinate to the Father and therefore, the first person of the Trinity was indeed the God of Jesus.

We praise or proclaim the Father's **blessedness** εὐλογητός because he transfers his state of glory and richness of being to us: **who has blessed us**. This is the same word used for **praise or bless**. Blessing has no pagan overtone of fertility nor is it a promise of material prosperity. It is a blessing proceeding from the being and the centre of the Father. Thus, it is **a spiritual blessing** πνευματική, for it is the granting to fallen creatures a presence **in the heavenly realms with Christ**. Christ has ascended to the Father and since he came down for us, Paul rightly asserts that we now belong in these eternal, spiritual and heavenly regions. It is a spiritual blessing because it is not merely a physical existence considered here but one granted by the Holy Spirit who makes us fit for such a place. The Father holds nothing of himself or this heavenly existence back from us. All of the redeemed existence of the universe becomes ours through Christ.

However, we must not overlook the relational side of this passage. The famous **in Christ or with Christ** ἐν χριστῷ indicates the incorporation of the church in Christ. The Father's aim has been to restore the relationship with him and the rightful direction towards him our lives should take. **Thus he chose us in him** (John 15:16). The in him appears again, and refers to Christ. The Father has chosen us freely, as an act of kindness and grace. He truly wanted us and sent his Son for us. We come to him not only through the power of the resurrection working on us but also in virtue of being raised with Christ and going where he goes (Rom 6:5). **We are united with him** (2:6).

Paul focuses on the choosing. He could have said that this took place at our baptism or even at Jesus' incarnation. But he says, **before the foundation of the universe** πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. The foundation of a building is laid first, so we were already chosen by the Lord before creation existed, that is, in the very mind and heart of God. Clearly, choosing him or deciding for Christ is out of the question. It is the Spirit who grants faith; we can only resist the Lord. Reproduction seems such a haphazard process according to nature, but the Father has acted with exacting precision despite the incompleteness of the universe.

Not only incorporation in Christ and an assured position with the Father but also granted us through the cross and resurrection of Christ is an existence without sin. Paul is thinking of a perfectly formed lamb, ram, oxen etc used in sacrifice that was not allowed to be deformed or damaged: **holy and unblemished before him**. In 5:27 Paul uses another image, that of the bride, to describe us. Such a state is beyond all comprehension when second by second we live every moment on earth with selfishness, doubt, and confused motives.

God has acted **in love**. This is the answer to the question as to why there is a universe in the first place. **He predestined** προόρισας us in another way of saying he chose us. **For adoption** οὐιοθεσίαν is another lovely image and it is clear what is meant here. We are not biological offspring but creatures in our own right yet freely included and accepted by the Father. This word indicates a

wonderful status as God's children. Again, grace is relational. Salvation is not about the saving of our own skin but being united to God as his children through Christ (John 1:12). Just as a couple will deliberately choose a child, God does the same. Yet today, a child is thrust on a couple much like a lottery. But the Father genuinely wants us. His divine **will** is involved and he takes **pleasure** in exactly who we are.

The last sentence is easily understood but the last phrase is interesting: *Εν τη ηγαπήμενω* **In the one he loves**. We are probably used to hearing that we are the beloved as John does refer to us in his first letter. But according to John 3:16, Jesus is the first beloved. God redeems us in the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29), thus indicating the full extent of the Father's love for us in Christ.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Ephesians 1:3-10

Verses 3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing along with Christ in the heavenly realms. Accordingly he elected us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and unblemished in his presence. This was accomplished by love, having decided before hand to adopt us as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will, for the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely gave us in the one he loved.

Christians enjoy **spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms** that have been obtained by Christ. **Along with Christ** *εν Χριστω* could be translated **by Christ** or **in Christ**. What are these spiritual blessings? They are pointed out in the next verse but are not limited to **being holy and unblemished in his presence**. Verse 7 expands on these as does verse 5, **to be adopted as his children**. **To be adopted** *υιοθεσίαν*, literally, **adopted as sons**, is a particularly beautiful word and is connected to the baptismal union with God through the Holy Spirit (13).

Three emphases are present. First, our position with God in the **heavenly realms** comes about through Christ. The opening sentence says that God is Jesus' Father: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. God has done something that is truly amazing. Formerly he could speak of Israel being God's son (Hosea 11:1) but this was not frequent. Indeed, the kings of David's line were called sons as the Psalms testify (2:7 et al.) and ruled for God as vice regents, and thus son is like a royal servant of God (2Samuel 7:5). There really isn't any Old Testament equivalent until we get to Christ, when astonishingly we learn that God has a Son (Hebrews 1:1). It is the incarnation then that is the mightiest of God's revelations. Our destinies are determined by this figure, Jesus, who indeed made clear in his ministry and his death and resurrection that he was God's Son (John 5:9-30). Therefore, God's relationship with Israel changes or rather, it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ his Son. He cannot relate to them except through his Son. This is why there was such hostility between Jesus and his contemporaries. First, his ministry and preaching were an implicit claim that he was God's Son, an act of blasphemy in the eyes of his fellow Jews. Moreover, he was stating that the primary relationship of God was with his Son, and not Israel. The presumption of uniqueness the people of Israel asserted had become an idolatry that even John challenged (Matthew 3:9). However, It is Christ who is loved first; **he is the one God loved** *εν τω ηγαπημένω*.

Secondly, our status with God as his children and where we end up, that is, **in the heavenly realms, in his presence**, is solely the result of the Son of God assuming our flesh and blood. What Jesus takes into his own being he redeems and takes into his place in the heavens. The motive is **love**, and indeed, the force is love. **Grace** too is a synonym of God's love. Grace is God's undeserved love for sinners. The grace of God is glorious and the noun functions as an adjective here and next becomes a verb that literally states, **he graced us** *εχαρίτωσεν*. God's desire was also for us as was clearly revealed in the Son coming to us, redeeming us, and being one with our flesh. But this last aspect, of being one flesh with us, has such a deep meaning that it is beyond our imagination and ability to

understand. Being **in Christ**, as mentioned above in verse 3, is really the chief thing and correspond exactly with **in him** εἰς αὐτόν, in verse 5, which refers to God. In one sense the gift of being a child of God leaves us as objects of God but once we are in Christ, then we are subjects of God's being, indeed the body of Christ because he took on our bodies.

Thirdly, God **destined, or elected, or predestined, or chose** ἐξελέξατο, take your pick, **before the foundation of the world** (see also 1:11). This action is described again using the concept of foreknowledge: **having decided before hand** προορίσας **to adopt us as his children**. Paul speaks of election in Romans 8:29-33. Our position as adopted children comes about because of the exercise of God's will, **the pleasure of his will** (Romans 11:5,6). It is abundantly clear, as opposed to Catholic teaching, that it is not our will that is the first step towards faith in Christ (Romans 9:11,12,16). It is God's will, and being his will, then it is an eternal will, a will exercised on us before we even existed, indeed before the universe existed. It is a decision in God and him alone. Our rejection of God's grace is the exercise of human freedom, but to be saved cannot come from us and can only be attributed to God's election, his sovereign freedom to choose us. This great doctrine of grace has been shortened to a single word applied now to all God's people, those reliant on the gospel, past, present and future: chosen (Colossians 3:12).

Verses 7-10

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions, flowing out of the riches of his grace, which he made to abound for us in all wisdom and understanding. He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his pleasure, which he displayed in Christ, a plan revealed in the fullness of time, for all things, things in heaven and things on earth, to be brought under the headship of Christ.

In Christ we **have redemption through his blood**. **Redemption** ἀπολύτρωσεν is a rich term, referring to the buying of a slave's freedom or paying of a ransom. Christ is our redeemer through his blood. This metaphor of the atonement is an image of release from bondage that Christ obtains for us by his death on the cross, **through his blood**. Sin, death and the devil enslave us and Luther added the wrath of God and the law. Christ frees us from them all by his own suffering under these powers (Galatians 4:4).

Wisdom and understanding are the gifts of enlightenment granted by the Holy Spirit who brings us to the knowledge of God in Christ.

These verses also pick up on the theme of God's will being exercise in eternity. **The mystery of his will** once again reinforces the teaching that God is responsible for every aspect of our salvation. It is not our decision or will to be saved being exercised here and it is not our doing to come to faith or even a precursor of faith. Salvation comes down to God's desire, **his good pleasure** εὐδοκίαν to save us. What is the **mystery**? It is the **plan** προέθετο, what God **set forth** in Christ, **for everything to be brought under one head, that of Christ**. This lovely sentence speaks of the unity of all things, including all the beings of heaven and all creatures and created things of this universe, a unity in one person, Jesus Christ. **To bring under one head** ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι not only signifies the leadership of Christ, that he will rule all things but that all things will find their right relation to each other by being related to him. The word in its original sense means to sum up, to add to a total as in a column of figures. Things only add up or reach their intended purpose when connected to Christ and incorporated in him. The kingdom then is not territory or a particular nation, such as Israel, but is a person, Jesus Christ, for he is the **one God loved**.