

Ephesians 1:3-6

Welcome to the Family!

A sermon by Dr. Bob Berger

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On the occasion of the baptism of

Jonathan Wyatt Owen and Micah Andrew Owen.

Theme: The blessings of election/adoption call us to worship and holiness.

PowerPoint slides are in red.

Word count:

Ephesians 1:3–6 (ESV)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 1:3–6 (NA27 w/GRAMCORD)

³Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ εὐλόγησας ἡμᾶς ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ,

⁴καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ,

⁵προορίσας ἡμᾶς εἰς υἰοθεσίαν διὰ Ἰησοῦ
Χριστοῦ εἰς αὐτόν, κατὰ τὴν εὐδοκίαν τοῦ
Θελήματος αὐτοῦ,

⁶εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἧς
ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ.

Our text this morning is from Ephesians 1:3-6. The focus of our text as well as the main point of this sermon is to call all of us, young and old, to bless the name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul is calling us to worship. If you have not worshipped this great God by the end of the service, whose acts on your behalf we are about to describe today, then you have truly missed the whole point of being here today.

A little later in this service, two young cousins, Jonathan and Micah Owen, will be receiving the covenantal sign and seal of baptism. I'll explain a little more about why we baptize the infant children of believers in a moment. However, for right now, as most of you know, I want to emphasize the fact that little Jonathan has taken the name

of Owen because of his being adopted by Blake and Joni.

Jonathan, of course, is not the only person who has been touched by adoption in this congregation. In fact, in reflecting upon that reality, I am overwhelmed by the sheer number of people in this congregation who have been touched by adoption. If you are willing to help me, I'd like to illustrate this fact by asking everyone who has had an adoption occur in their own immediate family to raise your hand.

Pause

As you can see, Jonathan is not alone in this experience, and as we will learn, adoption has a lot to teach all of us about our relationship with the Living God.

The practice of adoption is very old in ancient human history. There are several examples that we find recorded for us in the Old Testament. For instance,

- **Pharaoh’s daughter adopted Moses.**

Exodus 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

- **Mordecai, the Jew, adopted Esther, his cousin.**

Esther 2:7 (ESV)

⁷He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

- **And Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons by putting them on the same footing as his two elder sons, Reuben and Simeon.**

Genesis 48:5 (ESV)

⁵And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are.

Yes, adoption brings many blessings, but notice how these blessings are described in vs. 3 of Ephesians 1 – “**...every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places**”. That phrase “heavenly places” occurs five times in this short letter. (Cf. Eph 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) Taken in context, Paul is probably pointing us toward the “spiritual” vs. the “material” or “physical” blessings of adoption. That is, he is thinking of blessings related to heaven rather than earth and is declaring that these blessings are freely given to us.¹

What is the basis of these blessings? If you look at vss. 4-6 you’ll notice a three-fold basis for answering that question:

Vs. 4 – he chose us.

Vs. 5 – he predestined us

Vs. 6 – he glorified his grace in us.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1997, p. 10.

Let's talk about choice as it relates to Jonathan's adoption...

- The birth mother chose Joni and Blake based upon a Shutterfly photo book. This mother had looked at many, many books before, but when it came down to making her choice there were only a few books before her and something instantly clicked in her mind when she saw Joni and Blake's book.
- Now the birth mother could have changed her mind at any time and in fact, she almost did.
- Joni and Blake likewise had to choose to adopt Jonathan. As with all adoptions, there were potential landmines in his background. As those who were choosing to become his parents, they had to count that cost and still make a choice.
- Joni and Blake and the birth mother made a conscious choice to get to

know one another before Jonathan's birth.

- And yet in the end, the relationship between them was the most beautiful and selfless exchange between a birth mother and an adoptive mother that I have ever witnessed...and I have seen quite a few.

Now when the Apostle Paul in vs. 4 speaks of God's choice, he is talking about more than human adoption. For in this divine adoption, God decided that you were going to be His child before the very foundation of the world. We might say, by analogy, that God was looking through your Shutterfly book long, long before your birth. God's choice of you occurred long before you ever heard about the good news of the gospel and chose to believe it.

I want you notice carefully the important qualifier on God's choosing. Vs.

4 says, God chose us IN HIM. That refers to Jesus. The phrase “in him” occurs 8 times in Ephesians and the phrase “in Christ” occurs 13 times in the same book. God the Father is the subject of almost every verb in this section. God’s actions all take place “in Christ”, that is, God’s choice is anchored solely because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It’s because of the tie between Jesus and you that forms the guarantee of God’s choice of you.

Being “in him” or “in Christ” also helps us understand better why we in the Presbyterian church, in accordance with biblical teaching, baptize the covenant children of believers.

You see, the promise of our being in Christ is this: **I will be your God and your will be my people.** (cf. Jer. 30:22; Ex. 6:7) One of the places we see that clearly illustrated is in the establishment of God’s

covenant with Abraham. This is what we read in Genesis 17.

Genesis 17:7 (ESV)

⁷And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

Abraham was the father of the faithful. Abraham was counted as righteous before God because of his faith in Jesus the Messiah, in just the same way we are. But the Abrahamic covenant was very specifically a covenant that included the children of believers. And that's why all who were in that covenant had to be circumcised.

Now did circumcision make a person a believer? No. Likewise, does baptism make a person a Christian? No! The sign of the covenant is always first and foremost a

matter of the heart. That's why the prophet Jeremiah told the circumcised Jews:

Jeremiah 4:4 (ESV)

⁴Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.”

And Paul wrote to the Church at Rome saying...

Romans 2:29 (ESV)

²⁹But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

So, while neither circumcision nor baptism do not possess magical powers in the mere elements, nevertheless, they function as both a visible sign and seal of

the invisible grace which only God can provide.

Whether then it is through the OT sign of circumcision or the NT sign of baptism, this covenant relationship is meant to be demonstrated in the family. For you see, it is within the family that we most frequently first hear about the good news that Jesus died for sinners, sinners like me and my children.

Even though a child like Jonathan or Micah can't verbalize faith with words today, there is another covenantal sacrament that awaits them when they can express that faith. That sacrament is the Lord's Supper and when their faith can be demonstrated to be their own, that is when a young person can be admitted to the Lord's Table as a communicant member of Christ's Church.

I'd like to redirect our attention back to the words in Ephesians 1:4. If your

adoption was because of God's choice, then what does vs. 4 tell us God chose you for? In other words, what is God's plan for your life? Notice what the text says:

Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

⁴even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

God chose you so that you would be HOLY and BLAMELESS before him. Holy emphasizes the positive; blameless focuses upon the negative. But this is what your life is to look like BEFORE HIM.

Let me try to illustrate this through a story that is told about Alexander the Great.²

Alexander was a brilliant general, a master disciplinarian. His troops were greatly feared by all the world because they

² I first heard this in a sermon preached by Dr. D. James Kennedy at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church.

carried out his commands with lightening like efficiency. Nothing could stand before the dazzling armies of Alexander the Great.

However, sometimes there were those even among the army who needed punishment. The Great Alexander would hold court to decide upon such matters, often sending a soldier to the executioner because he had failed to carry out the general's bidding.

And so, it happened, that one day, a particularly young Greek soldier was brought before Alexander. Perhaps, it was the boy's extreme youthfulness that caused the emperor to spend an extra moment inquiring about his crime.

"Why has this prisoner been brought before me?" the general inquired.

"He deserted his post in the thick of battle, your Majesty," the guard declared.

“Why have you done this wicked thing?”
Alexander demanded of the young boy.

“Because, sir, I was afraid.”

Alexander stroked his chin. Even his enemies knew that the reason Alexander had conquered the then known world was because he was fearless. He never backed down. Alexander was ready to risk it all whatever the odds. To be a coward was a fate worse than death for this monarch!

“What is your name, boy? The emperor demanded.

“Alexander, your Majesty,” came the weak reply.

“What did you say, your name was?!”

“Alexander, sir!” the quivering voice responded.

Alexander the Great rose out of his seat, his eyes fixed upon the boy.

“Soldier,” he demanded, “change your name or change your behavior!”

One day, you and I will stand before an even greater King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And He will inquire of us:

“What is your name?”

“Christian, my Lord.”

“Christian?” You bear the name of Christ?”

Oh, dear friend, would that you and I would heed Alexander’s warning: “Change your name or change your behavior!”

For you see, election leads to holiness. Do not forget the purpose of your calling:

Ephesians 1:4 (ESV)

⁴...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Far from being an excuse for unholiness, election guarantees the opposite. The clearest indicator that we are among the elect, is the presence of a holy life.³ (Cf. Luke 6:43-49)

Speaking of election or predestination, I want us to focus upon vs. 5

Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)

⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

A lot of people seem to stumble over the concept of predestination. It's helpful to remember that we are left with only three choices:

1. **We can deny election.** We can maintain, no, I am saved because I chose to put my trust in Jesus. Oh, you did, did you? Well,

³ Boice, op. cit., p. 10.

look over at how chapter 2 of Ephesians begins...

Ephesians 2:1 (ESV)

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

Folks, DEAD people can't make choices. Dead people can't do anything at all. Simply put, you can deny predestination if you want, but if you do, you'll have to tear these pages out of your Bible, and that's not a good choice.

2. We can assert that election is based on God's foreknowledge that we were going to choose Him.

But this is really just a wimpy way of denying election. Here's how John Calvin posed the question:

“How could God foresee that which could not be? For we know that all Adam’s offspring is corrupted and that we do not have the skill to think one good thought of doing well, and much less therefore are we able to commence to do good. Although God should wait a hundred thousand years for us, if we could remain so long in the world, yet it is certain that we should never come to him nor do anything else but increase the mischief continually to our own condemnation. In short, the longer men live in the world, the deeper they plunge themselves into their own damnation. And therefore, God could not foresee what was not in us before he himself put it into us.” (John Calvin, Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians, p. 31-32)

This is just another way of saying that when people have trouble with the doctrine of election, as many do, their real problem is not with the doctrine of election, but with the doctrine of depravity which makes

election necessary. So, this so-called middle position which maintains that God somehow foresees good in our dead hearts is not a biblical position.

3. The third position is only one left and that is election, pure and simple. Election is the teaching that we are so hopelessly lost in sin that none of us would ever partake of God's great spiritual blessings unless God first chose some to partake of them and then made his choice effectual.

How did God make his choice effectual?

First, by sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sin as the basis of salvation, and then,

Second, by sending the Holy Spirit to apply the word of Christ to us by opening our eyes to see the truth and glory of the gospel and thus to respond to it by faith in the Savior.

So, do you see? ALL the blessings we enjoy must be traced back to this sovereign electing purpose of God towards us in Jesus Christ, just as Paul told us, here in the opening verses of Ephesians.

Don't overlook the specific language of vs. 5 in terms of what we are predestined for:

Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)

⁵he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Little Jonathan's adoption is a picture for us of the blessing that adoption can make in one's life. Human adoption always occurs because of the brokenness and sin which exists in our world. There are many reasons why adoption needs to occur:

- Perhaps one or more parent has died.

- Perhaps the birth parents never married and had no commitment to the child.
- Perhaps the birth parents were struggling with their own poor choices, or addictions, and didn't have the ability to care for a child.
- Or perhaps, like Moses' mother, persecution made it impossible for her to raise a child. (Remember that the impact Moses' birth mother had upon Moses lasted a lifetime even though she only knew him for a few years.)
- And sometimes, more than one of these reasons I've just mentioned exist and while it would be better for the child to be adopted, the parents refuse to release them. (These are the children who need our most fervent prayers.)

Yes, adoption always occurs in the context of brokenness. But that's true for

our spiritual adoption as well, we wouldn't need for God to adopt us if we hadn't rebelled against Him when we were first created by Him.

When I look at Jonathan, I think about how his life has been changed because of adoption. His birth mother loved him, very, very much. But she did not have the resources to raise him, physically, emotionally, or financially. So, she gave him the one gift that she could – the gift of a family.

I want you to think about your own birth parents for a moment. Some of us had wonderful parents, some of us had very poor parents. None of us, not a one, got to choose who our birth parents would be, so there should be neither boasting nor complaining about what God did.

Is God unfair? Is God arbitrary? Why does God choose to give us the parents that He does? And more important than that

question, why does God choose to become the Heavenly Father of any of us?

Don't miss the answer that is very clear in vs. 5:

Ephesians 1:5 (ESV)

***He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will* (Same slide)**

God's adoption of us is not arbitrary. He had a purpose in the working out of His will. Can we comprehend that purpose fully? No, only that God's decision is what will bring Him the most glory. And it is before that glory that we must bow in worship.

Is God's adoption of some but not all unfair? Should we raise our fist toward heaven and cry out that all deserve an equal chance?

An equal chance? We have had a chance, but we have wasted it by rejecting the gospel. And it makes no difference how many “chances” are given, or to how many. Apart from God’s sovereign work no one follows Jesus. So far as justice is concerned, what would be justice for us, if justice (and nothing but justice) should be done? Justice would be our damnation! Justice would sentence us to hell!

It is not justice we want from God; it is grace. And grace cannot be commanded. It must flow to us from God’s sovereign purpose decreed before the foundation of the world, or it must not come at all.⁴

What about your adoption?
Ultimately, any of us who are in Christ are adopted. Chad and Cherise’s son, Micah, has an opportunity as a covenant child to be adopted once. Jonathan, who came

⁴ Boice, op. cit., p. 18.

through a different path, may have two adoptions. But any adoption, especially your or my spiritual adoption takes place for one reason: Seen in vs. 4 which ends with these two all-important words: IN LOVE.

In love, he predestined us for adoption...

God's love is the foundation for all that He does for us in Christ.

But why would He do this? What kind of love is this, Thomas Hooker, a famous Puritan who helped establish the church in Connecticut, once asked. Here's the way Hooker put it:

“That God should send his dearest Son to love me, to love so incomparably and so inconceivably that I could not possibly hate him as much as he has loved and laid hold of me; that I could not go so far in unkindness to him that he has not gone

**further in tender kindness toward me –
what kind of love is this?”**

-- Thomas Hooker

What kind of love is this? Ultimately, there is only one answer and it is found in vs. 6 – to the praise of his glorious grace.

Ephesians 1:6 (ESV)

**⁶to the praise of his glorious grace, with
which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**

Do you see now, why the only proper response to this text is WORSHIP?

Jonathan, you don't understand any of this today. In fact, little guy, you've slept through the majority of your Papa's sermon. But that's OK, Jonathan, we are just like you. We don't understand, we can't comprehend the actions of our Heavenly Father on our behalf. But, because of His grace and for His glory, we still inherit the greatest of spiritual blessings

in Christ. And all those who are in Him, as they gradually learn more and more about their adoption also grow in holiness.

Let's pray.

Service of Baptism:

Bob shall read the covenant promises:

For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:31)

Tom shall then propose the following questions to both Blake and Joni and Chad and Cherise Owen:

1. Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his) behalf, and do you look in faith to the

Lord Jesus Christ for (his) salvation, as you do for your own?

3. Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him), that you will teach (him) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

Tom shall ask the congregation:

Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?

Bob shall then baptize Jonathan Wyatt Owen.

Tom shall then baptize Micah Andrew Owen.

Bob shall lead in prayer for both families.