

EPHESIANS

1:1-6

Introduction

Jesus promised you that following Him would not be a burden. He said,

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Matthew 11:29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
Matthew 11:30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Why are so many believers laboring under heavy burdens? Why do they find it so difficult to live the Christian life?

When Jesus promised that His yoke was easy and His burden was light, He prefaced it by saying, "*Learn of Me.*" Perhaps we have such a hard time **living** for Jesus because we don't **learn** of Jesus.

This Bible pattern of *learning*, then *living*, is evident in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

1. The first three chapters are all about learning; they are all about what God has done for us.
2. The final three chapters are all about living; they are about what we are enabled to do for God.

Chapters one, two, and three are about *doctrine*; only then are chapters four, five, and six about *doing*. Three chapters express your spiritual *wealth* as a believer; only then are you expected to *walk in the Spirit* as a believer.

The letter to the Ephesians will get intensely practical. It will discuss and give direction for the church, for the home, and for society. But you cannot skip ahead.

There is a single, amazing sentence in chapter one, beginning in verse three and continuing through verse fourteen. The English

language breaks it into several sentences; but it is one sentence in the original Greek.

This one sentence has three subjects:

1. In verses three through six you see the will of God the Father in selecting you;
2. In verses seven through twelve you see the work of God the Son in sacrificing Himself for you;
3. In verses thirteen and fourteen you see the witness of God the Holy Spirit in sealing you.

We'll concentrate in this study on the will of God the Father in selecting you. We'll see two things: #1 The Father Chose You In Christ Before Creation, and #2 The Father Chose You In Christ For Completion.

#1 The Father Chose You In Christ Before Creation (v1-4a)

Paul founded the church at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. About ten years had passed and he was writing them from prison. Keep his imprisonment in mind as you read his exclamations of praise.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

“Apostle” means *sent one*. A requirement for apostleship was to have physically seen the resurrected Jesus (Acts 1:21). That’s one reason why there are no apostles today.

Paul was an apostle “by the will of God.” Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and later in the desert, and personally commissioned him as His apostle.

This letter was written to both a *local* audience, and to a *larger* audience. The local audience was “the saints who are in Ephesus.” The words “in Ephesus” are not in some original manuscripts. Bible scholars believe that this letter was first intended for the local church

at Ephesus, but also intended for other churches in the region as well – in fact, for all the churches. You can put our name there if you want – “the saints who are in Kings County.”

“Saints” means *set apart ones*. **Every believer** is a set apart one, a saint. You do not become a saint because of achievement; you become a saint the moment you accept Jesus Christ.

“The faithful in Christ Jesus” qualifies the word “saint,” but not in the way you might think. It has nothing to do with their faithfulness. **Nothing in these verses has anything to do with what you are supposed to do for God – only with what God has done for you.**

The Temple of the goddess Diana was in Ephesus. Her worshippers were also called “saints.” The saints Paul was addressing were those who had put their faith in Jesus Christ. The word “faithful” describes their *belief*, not their *behavior*.

Ephesians 1:2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whole sermons can be preached on this salutation of grace and peace. “Grace” reminds you that your salvation is by God’s unmerited and undeserved favor. “Peace” is the result of grace and refers to both having peace *with* God and having the peace *of* God.

The word “and” in verse two makes “the Lord Jesus Christ” equal with “God our Father.” It declares that Jesus is God.

Paul takes a deep breath as he is dictating this letter and launches into his long sentence.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

“Blessed” is our word *eulogy*. It means *to speak well of*. Paul was in prison... But he had only words of praise for God. He calls God the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God was His Father in the sense that He sent Jesus to earth as a man. Paul had just declared Jesus was God; now he reminds you that Jesus was also human. Jesus is fully God; He is also fully human.

God has “blessed us.” It doesn’t mean He speaks well of us – *although He does!* It means that He has done wonderful things for us. What He has done is provided us “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”

This is one of the things you *learn* in order to *live*. You have already been blessed with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” All the things you need to live the Christian life on earth are spiritual, and they are available to you in heaven when you need them. They come to you from heaven through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Since these spiritual blessings are already yours, you don't need to *ask* for them as much as you need to *appropriate* them.

They are yours because you are “in Christ.” Get used to this phrase; it is used twenty-seven times in Ephesians! God sees every human being as either being “in Adam” or “in Christ.” By your natural birth, you are in Adam. But by your supernatural birth, you are in Christ. In Adam, you are born in sin and condemned by God. In Christ, you are born-again and accepted by God.

Verse four tells you how it is you are “in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...

The word “chose” is *eklego*; it means *to select out for one's self*. The “foundation of the world” refers to the creation of earth. **Before God founded the world at creation, He selected you in Christ.**

What is so wonderful about God selecting you? When you select someone, it is based on some type of merit in them or advantage to you. *Not so with God!* It was solely on the basis of His grace that He chose you. When God selected Israel to be His special people, He made it clear to them that it was not anything about them that influenced His choice (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). It was solely on the basis of His love and grace. The same is true of you, as you read in Second Timothy 1:9,

2 Timothy 1:9 [God] has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

You did not earn, nor do you deserve, to be selected by God. Since your salvation is by grace, all spiritual blessings in heavenly places are available anytime you need them. They do not need to be earned, and they could never be deserved. They are simply received by faith.

Scholars call God's selection the Doctrine of Election. Godly men have for centuries struggled to understand exactly how God's election works. Simply put, Since God selected me in Christ before creation, what choice (if any) do I exercise in my salvation?

This question regarding God's choosing and my choice is sometimes described as God's sovereignty versus man's free will. It is a subject that divides Christians. Two major views about election dominate the theological landscape: There are those who believe in what is called *unconditional election*, and there are those who believe in what is called *conditional election*.

Unconditional election says that your salvation **is not** conditioned at all on your choice or free will but solely on God's sovereignty in selecting you in Christ before creation. Those who hold this view in its many forms are commonly called "Calvinists" because they follow the teachings that are based on the writings of the reformer John Calvin. Calvinists are famous for their five point system, represented by the acrostic "**TULIP**" – **T**otal depravity... **U**nconditional election... **L**imited atonement... **I**rresistible grace... and **P**erseverance of the saints.

Conditional election says that your salvation **is** conditioned upon your choice and free will. God selected you based on His foreknowledge that you would exercise your free will to choose Jesus Christ in response to the Gospel. Those who hold this view in its many forms are commonly called Arminians because they follow the thinking of Jacobus Arminius.

These are the two major views. One emphasizes God's sovereignty; the other emphasizes man's choice and free will. Which is correct? **Neither!** Neither is correct because either of them leads you to conclusions that are both extreme and unbiblical.

If election is unconditional, then it follows that you must be born-again *before* you can exercise faith; it follows that Jesus Christ *did not* die for the sins of the whole world, but only for the sins of the elect; and it follows that those who are not among the elect are predestined for Hell with no hope of ever responding to the Gospel.

I'm not making this up. In fact, I'm holding back. Ask a Calvinist who are the "whosoever" in John 3:16 that may "believe," and he will tell you it is limited to the elect, *not* all mankind; ask Him who the "any" are when Peter says, "God is not willing that any should perish," and he will tell you it is only the elect, *not* all mankind; ask who the "all" are when Paul writes that Jesus is the "Savior of all men, specially those who believe," and he will tell you it is the elect from all walks of life, *not* all mankind. Many of the most precious verses in your Bible are re-interpreted to extreme and unbiblical conclusions in order to fit their five-point system.

The Arminian understanding of election as conditional also leads to many extreme and unbiblical conclusions. Arminianism says that we inherit only "pollution" from Adam, *not* a sin nature. Thus you are not a sinner until you consciously and voluntarily sin. Nothing could be more obvious in Scripture than the fact that you inherit a sin nature from Adam and are born in trespasses and sin.

If election is not unconditional... And if it's not conditional... What is it?

There are two preferable alternatives. One says that election is *corporate*. Ephesians 1:4 says that before creation God purposed to select "us," referring to a group, *not* to individuals. Any individual who identifies with the group by exercising faith in Jesus is comprehended as having been selected "in Him" before creation.

The other alternative doesn't really have a specific name, but it says that election is *concurrent*. It says that the Bible teaches **both** the sovereignty of God and the free will of man, and that **both** are true **concurrently**, or **simultaneously**.

I like this view of election because it's the view Jesus held! Jesus said,

John 6:37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, **and** the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.

Men have a tendency to go to one or the other extreme simply because they cannot fully reconcile in their finite minds how these two seemingly contradictory concepts can simultaneously be true. The Bible reveals both God's sovereignty and man's free will to choose. We therefore believe both, and leave the reconciling to God.

There is a famous illustration of these simultaneous truths. It shows a human being standing before a doorway. On the arch over the doorway is written, "*Whosoever will*," indicating your choice and free will. As the person passes through the doorway and looks back, over the archway is written "*Chosen in Christ*," indicating God's sovereignty.

If I've lost you in this discussion, it's not because you're unintelligent – *only uninterested*. You don't see how this is of any real concern. **It is of real concern to me.** In the past few years there has been among Christians a resurgence of debate and division over these issues, especially with regard to an aggressive Calvinism which seeks to "convert" believers to itself. We have had members of our body "convert" to Calvinism and depart our church fellowship. We have seen whole Calvary Chapel's "convert" to Calvinism and depart our fellowship of churches. People call me all the time who are being hammered by their Christian friends to "convert" to Calvinism – causing tremendous confusion and division.

I'm not a Calvinist; I'm not an Arminian. The Bible cannot be reduced to only these two systems. **Don't become an extremist.** You are chosen, but free.

I stopped in the middle of verse four. That's because the rest of verse four, and verses five and six, take up a different theme.

#2 The Father Chose You In Christ For Completion (v4b-6)

Paul has been talking about the *people* God selects before creation. Now he tells you God's *purpose* in selecting them.

Ephesians 1:4 ...that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

The phrase “before Him” means *to see down into*. It describes a penetrating gaze all the way down into our deepest parts. This is not a critical judgment; it is a satisfied contemplation. God **already** sees you as completed; He already sees you “holy and without blame.”

“In love” is the motive for what comes next:

Ephesians 1:5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Because of His love, God has “predestined you to adoption.” “Predestination” is a doctrine that unnecessarily confuses many people. The mistake they make is equating predestination with election. They believe that the elect are predestined by God to be saved, and that those not elect are predestined by God to be damned. It is called “Double Predestination.”

No one is ever predestined either to be saved or damned.

Predestination only describes the destiny of those who are saved. It describes what God does for saved people. God “adopts” them.

Adoption in the Roman culture was not what it is to us. It was not the adoption of orphans who were never born into your family. Adoption was a legal procedure by which your natural born son was publicly declared an adult and given all the rights and privileges of adulthood.

When you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus, you immediately become a child of God. It is also God’s “good pleasure” to immediately “adopt” you – to immediately give you all the rights and privileges of fully mature, adult sons.

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

“Accepted” can have a neutral or negative connotation to us. You might be accepted into college by barely meeting the minimum standards.

That is not the meaning here! You are “accepted in the Beloved,” accepted in Jesus. God the Father accepts you the same way He

accepts Jesus. You are every bit as beloved to God as is His only begotten Son.

Think of “accepted” in terms of access. Let me give you an example. Did you know that at Disneyland there are some restaurants that are not open to the public? When I was dating Pam, she had a friend whose family was wealthy. They could go to these restaurants. One evening Pam’s friend arranged it so that we could go, too. He called ahead and left our name with the receptionist. When we got there, we were granted access – the same full access that her friend and his family enjoyed.

Conclusion

All of this, and much more, is your wealth as a believer. It is in the heavenly account you draw from whenever you need spiritual help for your walk.

Jesus promised, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). Learn, then live, and you won't be burdened.