

Blueprint: God's Design for the Church

Chosen by God

Ephesians 1:3-6

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Open to the book of Ephesians chapter 1. I appreciate each one of you being here this morning. Friday was grandparent's day at New Covenant Christian School. My three grandsons, Crider, Finley, and Garnet all attend school there, so Memish and I went to be a part of their class. One of the assignments that Crider's teacher gave him was to interview Memish and then Papaw. One of the questions Crider asked me was "Papaw, when you were in school, what was your favorite subject?" Now, I just got excited to tell him. You have to understand that I loved school. I didn't go to school for recess or sports; I went to school to learn. I loved school, and my favorite subject in school was grammar. I was educated at Faxon Elementary School. You just have to understand that I love parts of speech, clauses, participles, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, infinitives, and everything about grammar. Now, I didn't like literature. Shakespeare and I did not get along, but I loved the King's English. Now, I know I don't speak it very well. As a matter of fact, when I was in school, I could write perfect grammatically correct papers and get 100 just about every time. I remember one time asking one of my teachers, "If I can write the King's English so well, why can't I speak it correctly?" She told me it was because everybody around me spoke it incorrectly and that influenced me. So, it is all your fault that I don't speak the King's English correctly! But I want you to know that on paper I understand the King's English.

Now, I said all that to say this...the passage this morning, and what we are going to be talking about for the next three weeks, is a Christian grammarian's dream. We are going to read verses 3-6 today, next Sunday we will deal with verses 7-12, and the following Sunday we will deal with verses 13-14. You have to remember that the Apostle Paul used two hundred and forty-five words in one long continuous sentence. Wow! That is a grammarian's dream to just be able to write, and write, and write, never pause, and never stop. Now, we were taught at Faxon that if you are going to be a good communicator, you have to communicate in short simple sentences. Do you remember that? If I had turned this sentence in at grammar class at Faxon, it would have come back with red marks all over it. But we are not going to mark it up this morning because Paul is writing under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. Even under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, he broke every Greek grammar rule known to the Greeks. As a matter of fact, to make this more palatable to us so that we can digest what Paul is saying, the ESV Bible has actually broken this one sentence into five sentences. There are two sentences in verses 3-6 and we are going to look at it this morning as we talk about God's work for God's glory. In verses 3-14, we are studying under this thought, and it's a core issue: salvation is not man-centered; it is God-centered. Salvation is God's work for God's glory. Now, some of you are not going to believe what you are going to hear this morning, but they are not my words—it is the Word of God. I ask you to follow along with the Scripture because Hardin Baptist Church is not based on the opinion of me; it is based on the written Word of God.

Scripture

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

My assignment this morning is verses 3-6, but I want you to see how this passage breaks down. Verses 3-6 are going to talk about the work of God the Father in our salvation. Verses 7-12 will talk about the work of God the Son in our salvation. Verses 13-14 are going to talk about the work of God's Holy Spirit in our salvation. Paul is going to say that God is to be blessed, and the reason is because of the work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit in our salvation. Basically, this passage will teach us that God the Father chose us, God the Son bought us, and God the Holy Spirit seals us. You will notice at the end of each section what Paul talks about with clauses and modifiers—the work of the Father, the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Spirit. At the conclusion of each statement about the work of God in verses 6, 12, and 14, Paul says it's to the praise of the glory of His grace, or to the praise of His glory, and the praise of His glory. Three times, the Bible tells us the reason the Father does what He does, the Son does what He does, and the Holy Spirit does what He does is to the praise of His glory. Does everyone understand the core principle that Hardin has woven into its DNA? Salvation is God's work for His glory. Got that? We didn't make that up here at Hardin. We didn't get together, have a staff meeting, and decide this is what we wanted to believe as a church. This comes right out of the preaching/teaching ministry of His Church. My responsibility this morning is to be true to verses 3-6 and talk about the work of God the Father.

The Work of God the Father

Right off the bat, Scripture says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." God is to be blessed, according to Paul. In other words, God is worthy of our praise. This word, blessed, is where we get our English word, eulogy, from. If you have ever been to a funeral, you know there is a certain part in the funeral where they have the eulogy to the person who has died. Whoever delivers the eulogy says really good things about the person who has died. As a matter of fact, sometimes they say so many good things about the person who died that I have to pinch myself to see if that's really the man I knew. See, eulogy means 'to speak well of,' so the Bible says you and I should speak well of God. You and I

should praise God. God is worthy of our praise. Why? Paul says because He has already blessed us in Christ.

Listen to me. Despite what some preachers preach on TV, you do not praise Him so He will bless you—you praise Him because He has already blessed you. In this passage, there is a blessing that is due. God is due our blessing. But then, there is a blessing received. We receive blessing, and because we receive blessing, we bless Him. We praise Him. This is important...our blessings are in Christ. According to Scripture, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. There is not a blessing that you have missed out on. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been blessed with every blessing that is possible for you to be blessed with. Just so you understand where these blessings are, Paul says we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. The blessings are not here. Did you hear that? The blessings are in Heaven where Christ is. This is why when we get to Ephesians chapter 2 where the Bible is talking about salvation by grace through faith, the Bible says that by God's grace we have already been made right with Christ, we have been raised by Christ, and we have been seated with Christ in the heavenlies. We touched on this last week—I am standing before you right here, but the Bible also says that I am in Christ—but Christ is not here, Christ is in Heaven at the right-hand throne of God, sitting. If Christ is at the right-hand throne of God and I am in Christ, where am I while I am here? I am there too. What am I doing there? I am doing what Christ is doing. What is Christ doing? He is sitting. Why is He sitting? He is sitting because my salvation is complete. What am I doing? I am resting. I have the blessing of rest. I am not having to work for my salvation, I am not having to try for my salvation, I am simply resting in the finished work of Christ, and I have been blessed in Christ.

Here is what Paul begins to do in this text, he is going to start running through the list of the blessings we have in Christ, not exhaustively, but giving us an example. These examples magnify the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Do not just think about your salvation being about the work of God the Son. The work of God the Father and the work of God the Holy Spirit are included in your salvation as well. Look what the first

blessing is. Verse 4 says, “even as He chose us in Him.” The first blessing that you and I have in Christ and the reason we should worship God and praise Him is because He chose you in Christ. Wow. Is that cool or is that cool? Then in the next verse, the second blessing is going to be this, “He predestined us.”

I get asked this a lot, “Doesn’t it make you nervous when you preach on election and predestination?” The answer is no and here is why. It is because I didn’t make this up. This did not come from a man named Saint Augustine, this did not come from a man named John Calvin, and not even the man named the Apostle Paul; this comes from God Himself. If you are going to be a Bible believing Christian and you are going to attend a Bible believing church, you have to say what the Bible says. There is a man I run into in Murray all the time and every time I meet him, he tells me they don’t believe in predestination at his church. I just let it go, but I always think how can you be a Christian and attend a church that doesn’t believe in election and predestination when the Bible begins the book of Ephesians with both of those doctrines? According to the Bible, the reason these two doctrines are in Scripture is because it is supposed to lead us to praise God and Him be worthy of our worship. Do you hear this? When we finish saying what we are going to say this morning about election and predestination, it should cause each one of us to fall on our face or stand to our feet, raise our hands in worship, and praise God the Father for what He did for us in choosing and predestining us! And you are going to tell me you don’t believe in these doctrines—when they are not written to be controversial or divide us, they are written to cause us to worship Him.

The Doctrine of Election

“He chose us in Him.” Every time I see this word, choose, in the Bible I go back to being a kid, because my first experience with being chosen was being a grandson of Granny and Granddaddy Bogard. My mother was the youngest of eight kids so there were a lot of us. Granny Bogard lived on this big hill called the Hyland Hill subdivision. There were several families in that subdivision and they had a lot of kids, and so when we all got together, we had enough people to have three or four baseball teams. We had this baseball field on top of the hill and we would choose teams. They

would pick the four best players and the rest of us—I was never a captain—would all stand in line, and those four players would choose their teams. If you are going to choose, you have to have a choice, right? Now, if you were in the line, you desired to be a first-round draft choice. You wanted it to go number one. We were playing baseball, so the reason the captain is going to pick you first is because of the skill you have as a baseball player and how you can contribute to the team. Well, I was never in the top round as a pick, but I understand why those captains picked some of those players.

Now, if that is the image you have of God chooses us, you are going to have to get that out of your mind. You have to trust me on this. When you study what Scripture teaches about the doctrine of election, please note this, God did not choose you based on anything within you. He made a choice of you based on what was in Him. Whoa! He didn't choose you when you believed in Him, and He didn't choose you when you became a saint. He chose you before the foundation of the world, before there was even a you. He chose you, knowing you would be born in Adam and you would be constituted a sinner, and you would be separated from Him. There was nothing in you that caused Him to choose you. He chose you based on what was in Him. I want you to know this...He had a choice. He didn't have to choose you, but He did. Amen? Wow! We have been chosen by God! If you understood what I just said, that is not based on human speculation—that is based on divine Revelation. It will not lead to arrogance or boasting, but it will cause you to be humble. Humble that you are a saint of God because you understand that your identity in Christ isn't based on what you do for God, but it is based on what God has done for you, not just in eternity present, but in eternity past. That is cool!

Now, there are some people who want to take the edge off this doctrine and they want to say that God chose Christ and that He is the chosen one; and then when you choose Him, He chooses you, so you get yourself elected when you believe. Can I ask you this? Does that sound like that is what Paul is saying here? Wouldn't it be really easy for Paul to say God chose Christ and when you chose Christ, He chose you? The Bible doesn't say God chose Christ; the Bible says God chose us. He did choose Christ,

so Christ is a chosen one of God, but you are a chosen one of God and I am a chosen one of God if we are saints of His.

- **Chosen before the Foundation of the Word**

When were we chosen? It was before the foundation of the world. How can God make a choice of me when there isn't even a me there? Here is what you have to remember. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is holy, holy, holy. He is both transcendent and immanent at the same time. Transcendent means that God is beyond time; He is outside of time and space. Before time, there was just God. God brought time and space into existence. So, this God who is beyond space and time is also immanent in space and time, in the same time. So God is both beyond and near at the same time. Is that cool or is that cool? Here is what He can do...He can make a choice of you before there is a you, and then when there is a you, you can still choose Him and your choice will still be a real, meaningful choice. I want to make sure you know this. God did not choose you because you chose Him, you chose Him because He chose you. It is His choice of you that made your choice of Him possible.

So, what should we do? We should worship him. He is worthy of our praise. Can I ask you this question? Why did He choose you? What does the Bible say? The Bible says so that you would be holy and blameless before Him. In Ephesians 1:2, Paul is writing to the saints, but in this verse, the reason God chose us is so that we would be holy...but the word holy in the Greek is the same word as saint. So why did God choose you? He chose you to be a saint. What is at the core thought of being a saint? We are holy. What is at the core of being holy? We are set apart, different, and in a class all by ourselves. We have been separated. If you ever wonder why God chose you and that choice be within Him not within you, here is why He did it. He did it so that when there was a you—after living a life dominated by sin in Adam and all of your friends and neighbors seeing what you were like in Adam—God saved you to be set apart, to be separated, to be different, to be holy, to be a saint. Please hear me. Quit letting Satan tell you that you are just an old sinner saved by grace. If you buy into that, most of you will go back into work and you will tell the dirty jokes, you will give into racism, you will give into being bigoted, you will

give in to all of those sins instead of being that person who is different, that person who is set apart, in a class all by himself, that person who is in a class being saints, being Christians. Got it? Don't you ever tell me that you being chosen by God before the foundation of the world means it doesn't matter what you do! The very reason God chose you is so that it would change your life from a life of sin to a life of salvation, and the purpose for you being chosen is so that you would live up to your identity in Christ and you would be a saint. Some of us need to repent of what we say at work or how we act at home. The doctrine of election is not an incentive to sin; it is an incentive to a life of holiness.

- **Desire to be Holy**

How do I know I have been chosen by God? I know because I desire be holy. Do you desire to be holy? That is how God designed you. He designed you to desire to be holy and blameless. The word, blameless, was used for the animals that were offered to God in the Old Testament. When it came time to worship God you couldn't just go out into the field and find the lamb that was getting ready to die and give it to God. The lamb that sprung his leg and wasn't going to make it?—You couldn't bring that lamb to God. It had to be blameless, no defects. You had to give God your best. You get where I'm going, don't you? Just as there were animals that were designed to be used in the service and the worship of God, God has designed you to worship Him, not to be a dead sacrifice, but to be a living sacrifice—not to be conformed by this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind and go back to work, back home, back to school, and live a life that reveals you are in Christ.

The Doctrine of Predestination

He not only chose us, but He predestined us. If you are new to Hardin, let's be honest here...predestination gets a bad rap. Have any of you ever met somebody and you have heard about their reputation before you meet them, and when you meet them you realize they aren't really who the other people say they were? I think predestination gets a bad rap. The reason predestination gets a bad rap is because it is linked to God's election. Here is what the Bible teaches. Those that God chooses, He then

predestines. This word, predestined, is a compound word that means 'before' and it means 'to horizon.' Have any of you ever gone to the beach and seen the horizon? Have any of you ever looked across the field and seen the horizon? You know that is the boundary; that is the limit. That is what this word means. It literally means 'to determine, to set limits, to set boundaries.' I don't know about you, but every time we use this word in regular usage, it is a good word. For example, if we are going to run a race and measure who is the fastest, we determine where the goal is. The first one across the goal wins. If there were not that predetermining of the goal, some people would keep changing the finish line. The guy in second and third would keep changing it. This is not a bad word; it is actually a good word. As a matter of fact, I actually believe this word for us in Dexter and Hardin would be this: the word blueprint.

Think about this, when Celisa and I got ready to build our house on 1204 Red Bud Road, we went to a store and bought a book that had a bunch of plans in it. When we decided the house we wanted, we chose that blueprint and then ordered it from the company out of South Carolina. They sent us the blueprints and we took them to a man outside of Hardin named Hershel and asked him if he would frame up that house. Hershel goes to the lumber yard, and then they bring all the lumber, block, and brick and they start piling it out in the yard. It didn't look a thing like our house, but we were confident, we never got worried, because Hershel was looking at the plan. Hershel took those boards and he would cut them and saw them, put them together and nail them, and the next thing you know the house began to be built. When it was finished, it looked exactly like we wanted it to look. Why did it look exactly like we wanted it to look? It was because we had a blueprint for Hershel to follow. Does anyone think that it's wrong to have a blueprint? No. Then why do you think predestination is bad? Why is it wrong for God, once He has chosen us, to have a blueprint to decide what our life is going to be like? I think that is cool! In other words, my life, all of the cuts, all of the nailing, all of the sawing, is according to a plan God has for me and for you.

Some of us need to repent of what we believe about predestination. Now, this is not what many of you have heard predestination is, but what you

have heard about predestination isn't what the Bible teaches predestination actually is. The Bible says we have been predestined to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. Paul, in Romans 8, said it this way—those that He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He, Jesus, might be the firstborn of many brothers. You have this picture of adoption, right, but that's the problem. When we read the biblical word, adoption, some of us have in mind American adoption. I love American adoption. I applaud our parents who adopt, but my first encounter with adoption was at Faxon. I was in the 6th grade in Ms. Outland's class and we had a boy come to class one day—his name was Mark, and Mark just melted. His mom and dad had told him the night before that they weren't his real parents, that he had been adopted by them, and it crushed his world...he fell apart. So Ms. Outland took a group of 6th graders, set us down in class, and put Mark in the middle. She began to describe adoption and what happened to Mark when he was an infant. She talked about how his mom and dad went into that orphanage and they chose him to be their child. By the time she finished, I wanted to be adopted too. I had loved my mom and dad up to that moment, but all of a sudden, as a 6th grader I understood that my mom and dad had to love me because I was their child! But not Mark's mom and dad—Mark's mom and dad loved him, they chose him, and they brought him home and conferred upon him the status of a child. And now, he was in line to receive their inheritance. That is not the picture of biblical adoption. That takes place in election.

- **Adopted as Sons**

God predestines us to adoption as sons, but the picture here is Roman adoption. In a Roman adoption, a father who had full authority over his family would adopt someone outside the family into the family, and they came into the family as adult sons—with the same rights and responsibilities as the natural children. Sometimes, Roman fathers would adopt slaves as sons, set them free from being slaves, and confer sonship upon them. Do you get that? God only has one natural Son and His name is Jesus. Do you know what predestination is talking about? Predestination is talking about God's plan for your life is for you, an adopted son, to one

day be just like the natural Son. Did everyone get that? God's plan for you is for you to be like Jesus in every situation of your life. Wow! How are you doing living up to big Brother? That is the blueprint of your life. This is why Paul teaches in Romans 8 that all things work together for good for those that love God, to those that are called according to His purpose. He has a blueprint for you.

Listen, according to Scripture, He predestined you according to His will. Catch this...I hear of churches who build their entire church ministries around the free will of man. Why don't you hear churches talk about the free will of God? How many of you have ever heard predestination dealt with in this way? "Well, that just is not fair" or "If that is true, then God is not just." How many of you have heard that? Look at your Bible, after it says we have been elected to be holy and blameless before Him, notice the next two words, in love He predestined us. The predestining of God to make us who He elected before the foundation of the world, to be like Christ according to the Scripture, is the act of a loving God. Do you understand this? Fate does not determine your life.

I was at a conference one time where the guy did not like the doctrine of predestination and he basically said that when God created us, He put us all in groups, and there was group one, two, three, four and he went through to group ten. Then he said God decided to save everyone in groups three, seven, and nine, and damned the rest to Hell. Are you kidding me? That is not the Bible! Your salvation is in the hand of a God who loves you and He chose you, not based on you, but based on Him. Once He chose you, He had a plan for your life and He determined that one day you are going to be just like Christ. Hang in there, momma! Hang in there, daddy! Hang in there, husband! Hang in there wife! Hang in there, business owner. If you have been chosen in Christ and you have been predestined in Christ, God's plan for you is to be like Jesus! Why? It is to the praise of His glorious grace. Wow!

This isn't about you and this isn't about me. It is about our God. Now, I know what you are thinking. You were reared by parents who taught you that you aren't supposed to do things for yourself. You are supposed to do things for others. So if God does things for Himself, does that mean God is

selfish? Does that mean God is sinful? Let's pause here just a moment. How can God do something for His glory and it not be sin? The reason is because God is not man—He is God, and He is holy, holy, holy. Think about this. If God did something for me, and He shared His glory with me and I get glory for it, guess what is going to happen. Someone is going to be drawn to me. Can I just let you in on a little secret? I am going to let you down. I am going to fail you. Sometimes people call me and need me to call them back, but when I call them back I am an hour or two too late, and I start apologizing. Sometimes someone really needs me, and I fail them. Do you see what would happen if God did what He did for my glory? The world would be in a mess. Do you get it now? Who is the only person in the universe who will never let another person down? God. Therefore, for God to be God, He must be self-centered. He must do what He is doing to promote His glory, because when He promotes His glory, it draws people to Him. And when people are drawn to Him, He does not let them down.

The Grace of God

Paul finishes by telling us about the work of the Father. By this amazing grace of God, He has accepted us in the Beloved; He has accepted us in Christ. Did you catch that? If you are new to Hardin, please hear us. Hardin does not believe grace is availability or that grace is equal opportunity. We do not believe that God just put Jesus on a cross and then left the rest up to us. If God had put Jesus on a cross and left it up to us, there wouldn't be anyone who believed in Jesus. No, Hardin believes grace is God's enabling power. It is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, so that now we can live a life obedient to God. When you and I live the life that God has ordained for us to live, we do not take credit for it, we deflect credit to God. It is His work for His glory. Do you know what that ought to cause me to do? What I am experiencing in my life right now ought to cause me to want to praise Him, praise Him for His amazing grace. God chose us and He predestined us, and it is all because of His amazing grace and to the glory to His grace.