

Ephesians: Gospel Truths for Gospel Living



The Father's Purpose
Ephesians 1:4-6

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Scriptural Text: Ephesians 1:4-6

Preaching Series | Ephesians: Gospel Truths for Gospel Living

August 28, 2022

The Beauty of Eph. 1:3-14 - These twelve verses constitute one long, complex and stirring majestic sentence of praise and adoration of God. These five sentences in the English ESV Bible are actually one long glorious sentence in the Greek.

It's an amazing prayer to start the epistle. It's an amazing eruption of praise, containing an amazingly rich amalgamation of gospel truths.

Listen to how various writers have characterized the sentence over the years:

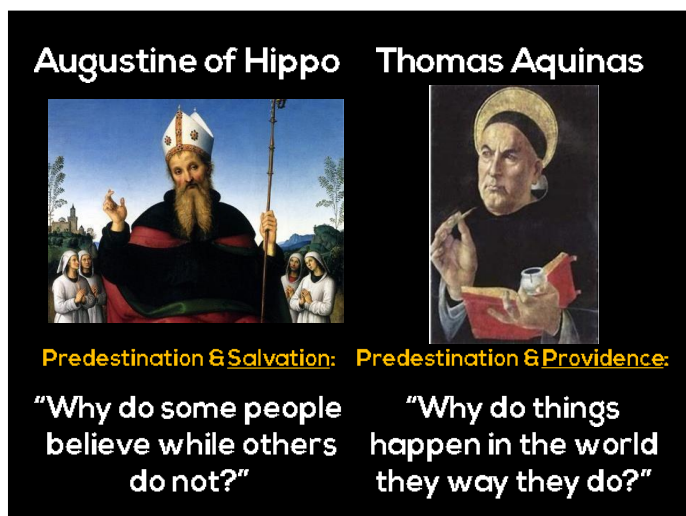
- “We enter this epistle through a **magnificent gateway**”
- It is a “**golden chain** of many links”
- “a **kaleidoscope** of dazzling lights and shifting colors”
- “A **snowball** tumbling down the hill, picking up volume as it descends,
- “a longwinded **racehorse**...careering onward at full speed.
- “**rhapsodic adoration** comparable to the **overture of an opera** which contains the successive melodies that are to follow”
- “The preliminary **flight of the eagle**, rising and wheeling round, as though for a while uncertain what direction in his boundless freedom he shall take”.¹

A gateway. A golden chain. A kaleidoscope. A snowball. A racehorse. An operatic overture. The flight of an Eagle.

This is how Ephesians begins – a glorious, grace-filled, awe-struck prayer of adoration and praise! I hope you read the Bible like that!

However, some of you are so triggered intellectually by the doctrine of election and predestination, that where Paul ends in **PRAISE (vs. 6)**, you end with a knot in your stomach trying to untie the Gordian Knot. You either rip the passage out of the Bible or practically ignore the doctrine which is mentioned in vs. 3 and vs. 11 of Ephesians 1.

FOUR OBJECTIONS to the DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION



Objection #1:

Predestination makes us all fatalistic robots.

Let's look at two dead guys!

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) treated predestination under the doctrine of salvation. His central question was: “*Why do some believe and others do not?*”

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), The Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church, treated predestination under the doctrine of providence. His central question was: “*Why do things happen in the world the way they do?*”

¹ Most (not all) of these references are taken from John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, 32.

You have to admit: these are two VERY DIFFERENT QUESTIONS! Augustine located predestination under the doctrine of SALVATION whereas Thomas Aquinas located the doctrine under the doctrine of PROVIDENCE:

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO	THOMAS AQUINAS
Location of the Doctrine: Predestination & Salvation	Location of the Doctrine: Predestination & Providence
Central Question: Why do some believe while others do not?	Central Question: Why do things happen in the world they way they do?

1. Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich Analogy. *“If it falls, the sandwich always lands “peanut butter side down!! Why oh why!!”*
2. At that precise moment, I come into your home. **“Friend, you are being a Roman Catholic in your view of predestination.”** And you say: “What do you mean, pastor, it was predestined that my peanut butter and jelly sandwich should fall “peanut butter side down”!! And that’s why I hate the doctrine of predestination!!”
 - a. Here’s the truth: Predestination does not determine which side the peanut butter sandwich falls. Nor which university you choose. Nor which career you decide to pursue!
3. The problem with Thomas Aquinas was that he flew the plane called “predestination” out of its proper New Testament environment. So when moderns argue that **“predestination makes humans into robots”**, they are actually arguing based on Roman Catholic assumptions (going back to Aquinas) rather than on a strictly New Testament basis.
4. One needs to distinguish very carefully between **“predestination”** and **“predeterminism”**. The two terms are not synonymous! Predeterminism (the idea that everything in life is predetermined) leads to fatalism. Predestination leads to humble gratitude for God’s grace. For the unmerited mercy of God! God brings people *dead in their sins* alive to God in Christ!



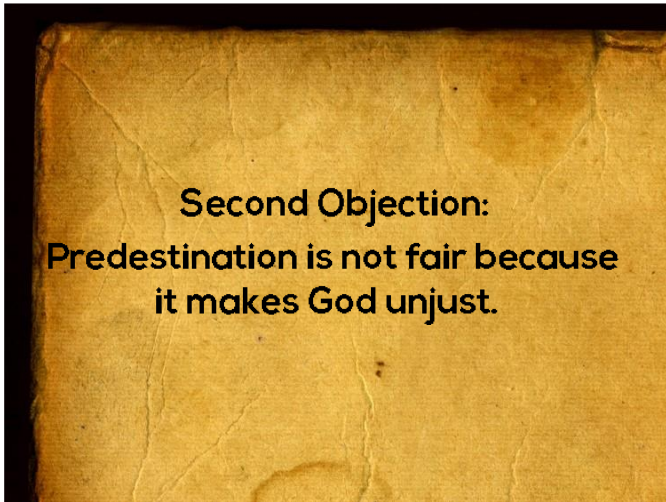
This is the First Objection: PREDESTINATION MAKES US ALL FATALISTIC ROBOTS. Truth is: No, that’s predeterminism which is categorially different than predestination. Predestination has to do simply with **salvation** and the unmerited grace of God!

Objection #2: Predestination is not fair because it makes God unjust.

If God chooses some, then logically (you say) that also means that God rejects others. And that is inherently unfair!

Here’s a principle for biblical interpretation. It can be summed up quite simply like this: “Shhhhh!”.

You don’t go on speaking where and when the Bible falls silent.



Great biblical interpreters go silent **precisely** and **exactly** when God in his word goes silent. That is, you go right to the edge of the cliff – when God talks, you talk – yet when God goes silent (“*Shhhhh!*”), then you also should go silent (“*Shhhhh!*”).

Yet you want to take the doctrine of election (because you are a rational creature) to its logical corollary.

In this case, my friends, that is bad biblical interpretation because EVERYWHERE that the Bible mentions predestination or the doctrine of election it is mentioned as an **object of praise!** **Wholly good. Gloriously merciful!** *A lavish display of the grace of God.*

Except (perhaps) in one place:

Romans 9:12-13: ...“The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written: ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’”.

These are two quotations from Genesis 25 and Malachi 1 and both passages are clear OT references to **nations** of the Old Testament rather than to **specific individuals**.

Listen to Genesis 25:

The Lord said to her (Rebekah):

*“Two **nations** are in your womb,
and two **peoples** from within you shall be divided;
one shall be stronger than the other;
the older shall serve the younger.”*

In the Old Testament, God chose Israel (rather than Edom) for its redemptive role in salvation history, does that mean that God hates all the Edomites? No! But it was Israel in the Old Testament who provided the swaddling clothes which led to Jesus the Messiah in the New Testament.

Election is for Service:

ABRAHAM: God’s choice of Israel through Abraham did not mean that he hated or despised other nations. God chose Israel to be a light and a blessing for the nations! (Gen. 12 & 15).

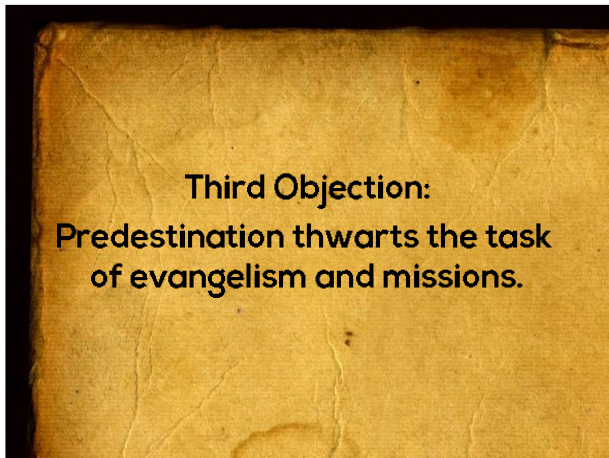
THE TWELVE: When Jesus chose the 12 disciples, surely, he was not rejecting and despising all other people! He chose the twelve to train up so that they could reach & bless the entire world!

PAUL: When Paul declares that God chooses the foolish and the poor (rather than the wise and the wealthy, 1 Cor. 1:27), he is not saying that God categorically rejects and despises the wise and the wealthy but simply to show that one does not come to know Christ through one’s worldly status.

What am I saying? I am arguing that the Bible does not take the doctrine of predestination to its logical corollary, and neither should you. So-called “double predestination”² is **TALKING OVER GOD** when He goes mysteriously silent. God is not *unjust* but *praised* for his role in election.

² Double predestination refers to God’s choice of some to salvation and others to damnation (reprobation).

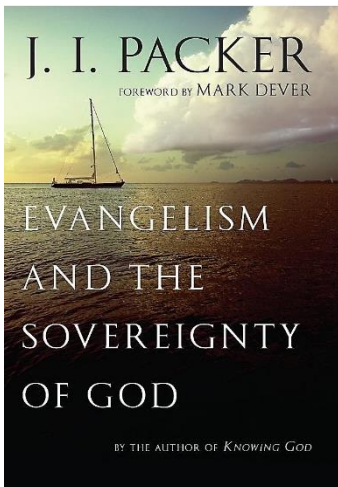
Objection #3: Predestination thwarts the task of evangelism and missions.



If God chooses people unto salvation by his grace through bestowing upon them the righteousness of Christ (*Christ alone through grace alone to the glory of God alone* was how the Reformers put it)...then why share the gospel with your neighbor? You might even wonder: “Why, pastor, did you even bother to spend more than a decade of your life in the cause of world missions? If God was going to bring people to salvation, he was always going to do it without you.”

Here’s the truth and here’s the counter: “How do you know, O Man, whether your preaching of the gospel is precisely the means through which God brings about his election?”

God appoints the means as well as the ends. God appoints believers to preach the gospel to bring about this salvation (Rom. 10:14-15: *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news*”). As a believer, you don’t know whether a person is elect or not, all you are called to do is preach and share the good news of the gospel of Christ so that the person may be saved!



J.I. Packer in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* actually argues that it is only because of the sovereignty of God that we have ANY hope of success in evangelism. Because successful evangelism without God’s sovereign grace is impossible!

J.I. Packer: “Were it not for the sovereign grace of God, *evangelism would be the most futile and useless enterprise that the world has ever seen*, and there would be no more complete waste of time under the sun than to preach the Christian gospel.” ... “**For God does what man cannot do.** God works by His Spirit through His Word in the hearts of sinful men to bring them to repentance and faith. Faith is a gift of God....So, too, is repentance....You and I cannot make sinners repent and believe in Christ by our words alone; *but God works faith and repentance in men’s hearts by His Holy Spirit.*” ... “You and I will never write off anyone as hopeless and

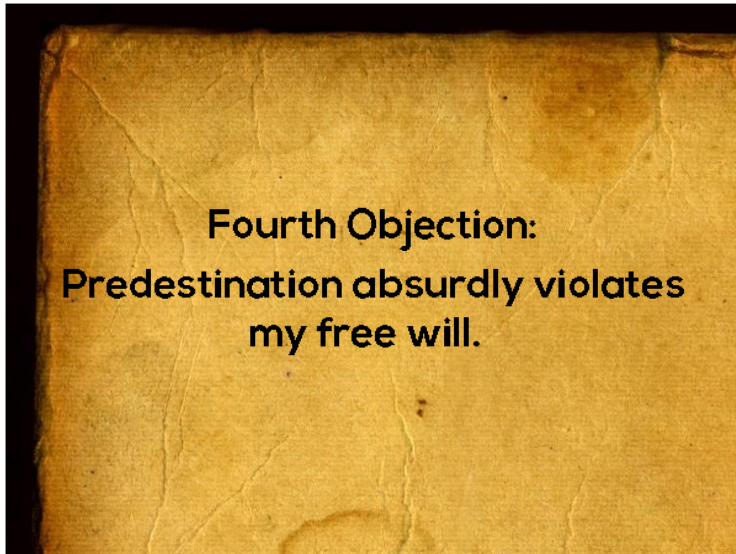
beyond the reach of God if we believe in the sovereignty of His grace.”

Why do you pray for people to know Christ? **Because God is sovereign in salvation.**

Why do you give thanks for your conversion? **Because God is sovereign in salvation.**

So our response to God’s electing grace is....*humble gratitude* and *reverent thanksgiving* for the grace of God that brought us to Christ!

The sovereignty of God does not thwart evangelism and missions, rather the sovereignty of God buttresses us and assures us that any success we experience in evangelism is wholly due to God’s grace alone.



Objection #4:

Predestination absurdly violates my free will.

I have already argued that predestination has to do with salvation and not with ordinary, earthly, creaturely decisions (whether to live in city or the country, to pursue a degree in Medieval English Literature or Macro-Economics.)

But here, I also want to make a distinction between **philosophical free will** and **theological free will**.
(Don't tune me out! I'm going to land this plane quickly!!)

PHILOSOPHICAL FREE WILL: Philosophically, the idea of free will is the capacity to choose the good and the bad - that your human agency is independent upon any external influences upon you. You are completely free to do good or to do bad. [Of course, *philosophical free will does not account for sin which is not even an external influence but an internal influence affecting your body, mind, spirit, soul, even your will – that from which you choose (the will) is bound by sin!*]

THEOLOGICAL FREE WILL: Theological free will is different.

Because “freedom” to choose sin, freedom to choose wrong, freedom to choose the bad and say “NO” to God - is that biblical freedom? That is not true freedom, biblically-speaking. The Bible calls that **slavery to sin**, not freedom. And so, you may *think* you want philosophical free will in your life to choose the good and the bad, but what you *really* want and what you *really* need is true freedom which found and experienced only in Christ.

Philosophical free will is actually **not** such a beautiful thing in your life!

Who is the freest person who ever lived on this earth? Christ! Christ always chose the good. Christ always followed God.

True freedom delights to do good. True freedom always participates in Christ. True (biblical) free will is participatory and Christocentric. John 8:32, 36 -- “And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free....and so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”.

Let me summarize it like this:

(1) To be “in Christ” is to be truly free. (2) Predestination does not imply that a person is not “free” (in the philosophical sense) to choose earthly things (creatures can choose to live in the city or in the country, to take a bike to work or take a car to work). (3) Predestination only implies that no one “chooses” God by their own “free will” because “that from which they choose (the will) is also fallen and bound by sin.”

So here's truth & the counter: So when God elects his people....he is also **giving you the gift** and the **experience** of **TRUE FREEDOM!** Election does not *take away* your free will but rather *establishes* biblical free will so that you may be truly free!

The main text – Ephesians 1:4-6

“Chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (vs. 4)

Chose us (*exelexato*) comes into our vocabulary as the word “election”. God elected or chose us in him before the foundation of the world. *Chose* is the only verb in vs. 3-14 (in this majestically beautiful sentence of Paul) that is not subordinate to another idea or another concept. Paul considers God’s *choosing* to be the **clearest indicator**, the **firmest foundation**, and the **most sublime pointer** to the free and sovereign grace of God in your salvation.

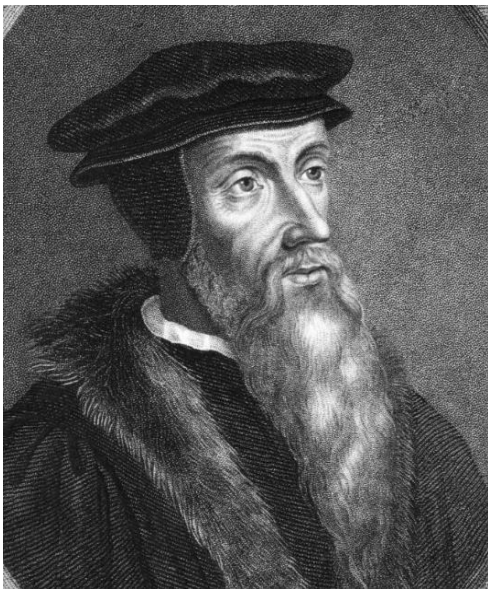
And when Paul further highlights the caveat “*before the foundation of the world*”, this is to remove all human doubt that you supplied **any merit** on your part, **any movement** towards God your part, **any human contribution** in terms of your works righteousness – all such notions are dumped and discarded completely through this phrase: *before the foundation of the world*. What you added to your salvation was your sin, and God gave you grace!

“In Him”

Yet this election is not simply a cold (Russian-roulette style) calculation. Why? Look at verse 4: *He chose us “in him”* - “in Christ”.

Before the foundation of the world, God has a beautiful and majestic and glorious thought: He thinks of Christ in his pre-existent, pre-incarnate form and then he thinks of you. “I want to put my BELOVED SON and my adopted sons and daughters in a relationship of love that lasts for eternity.”

God’s eternal choice is an **eternal embrace** of you by Jesus Christ your Savior!



“Christ is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception, contemplate our own election.”
~John Calvin

Election is Jesus Christ wrapping his big ‘ole arms around you. *And if you’ve never understood that about election, you’ve completely missed the doctrine.*

God’s eternal choice is an eternal embrace of you in Jesus Christ by a **wholly gracious**, and **wholly sovereign** and **wholly free** God! The Reformers went to the mat for these precious gospel truths.

As John Calvin famously put it, “**Christ is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception, contemplate our own election.**”

You contemplate **Christ** when you contemplate election. It’s not an abstract doctrine, but a warm embrace of Jesus.

“Holy and Blameless”

And it’s an embrace that removes something from you and supplies something to you. Something is taken away. And Something is given. *Before the foundation of the world that we should be **holy and blameless** before him* implies that when God thought of you – God knew exactly who you were. God

was not in the dark about your condition: you were **unholy** and you were completely worthy to be **blamed** and **judged** by a Holy God. Who was holy before salvation? No one! Who was blameless before salvation? No one!

BLAMELESS: And so God removes your blame. God removes your guilt. God removes your shame. *God has taken something away from you that pollutes your life, that strickens your conscious, and that frustrates your days.* The word “blameless” or “unblemished” is the same idea expressed in the Old Testament of an unblemished animal that the worshipper was required to bring before God in sacrifice.

Elsewhere, Paul could write: “*Present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God.*” (Rom. 12:1). How can you ever do that? You can only do that because God has removed your sin, removed your shame, and removed your guilt. Only then, do you stand *blameless before him.*

HOLY: So God takes away your blame (he takes something away). But he also supplies you with something you need. “*that we should be holy...before him*” (vs. 4). How is this possible? God not only takes something away but supplies the very thing required to stand before a holy God!

Christ’s perfection righteousness alone makes you holy. This was the issue in the 16th century during the Protestant Reformation. The issue was *never* whether God demanded righteousness to declare a person justified and saved. (Of course, God did! Nobody disputed that! Neither Rome nor Luther!) The central question was: where do you get that righteousness? Do **you** supply it? Or does **Christ alone** supply it?

The view of the Reformers was that *the only righteousness that has the necessary merit to meet the holiness and righteousness of God was that of the righteousness achieved by Jesus Christ through his life and death.*

It was by Christ **alone**. “*Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress.*”

What was “the dress” referred to by the hymnist? The dress was the ***righteousness imputed and given to you through Christ -- and Christ alone.***

The question is this: Did you bring some of your own righteousness and Christ’s brought some of his righteousness and together this made you stand before God holy? This was the Roman Catholic view!

The view of the Reformers was that Christ’s righteousness **alone** is the only righteousness that makes you stand before God as HOLY.

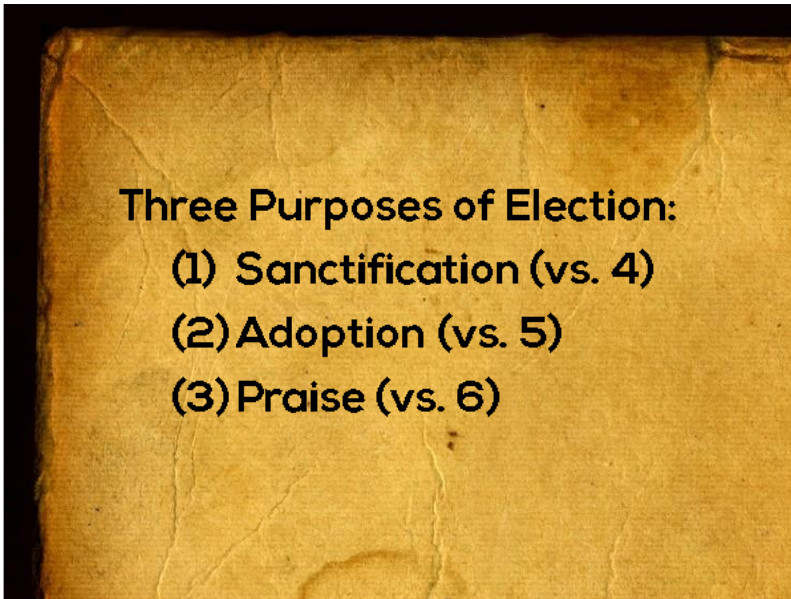
Example from Today: And humanity is still intensely divided over this question! The man on the street interview, if you ask a normal person in the street of America or Brevard County: “*Why should God let you into his heaven?*” - you will be greeted by a litany of complete drivel: “*I’ve done more good than bad. Because I’ve tried to be a good person. I’m kind; I’m responsible; I’ve tried to lead a good life.*”

What they are really saying is “**I want to supply something that God requires. I want to supply my own righteousness.**” The good news of the gospel is this: God supplies **ALL & through CHRIST ALONE** his righteousness is imputed to you (legal term; given to you) so that you are made holy *not by virtue that you supply a little, and God supplies a little* **but by virtue of your UNION with God’s HOLY SON who shares his own status of righteousness and holiness with you by grace.**

One commentator says this, “God does not choose us in Christ **because** we are holy and blameless. God does not choose us in Christ **because we are trying** to be holy and blameless. God does not choose us in Christ **because God foresees that one day we might** be holy and blameless. Being holy is not the ground of our salvation, it is the goal.”

Paul in the Context of Ephesus: Why does Paul, especially to the Ephesian Christians, highlight this gospel of grace in election?

Well, in Ephesus, the goddess of fertility, Artemis, was often depicted with the signs of the zodiac prominently displayed on her chest as a necklace. So the Ephesians, as a people, were often thrown to and fro by astrology, by magical practices, and by the whims of ancestral spirits and things like ancient horoscopes. Thus, Paul was trying to convince the Ephesians, through the doctrine of election, that their fate was not in the hands of changeable and unpredictable and impulsive spirit forces or ancestral spirits. But rather their fate (we would say salvation) lies secure in the eternal hands God who chosen them before the foundation of the world.



In summary, in these three verses (Eph. 1:4-6), Paul gives us **three great purposes** of our election.

Sanctification (vs. 4), adoption (vs. 5), & praise (vs. 6).

In love, he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (vs. 5)

In vs. 5, Paul talks about the 2nd purpose of election: our adoption as sons and daughters of God!

Illustration #1 of Adoption: Thomas Long, long-time preaching professor at Princeton Theological Seminary once described adoption like this:

In the newspaper last week there was a story about the process families go through in adopting children. The account related the usual details: the huge number of couples wanting to adopt, the much, much smaller number of “desirable” children, the extremely long waiting lists, the high legal fees, all the red tape.

The story was also told of the experience of the Williams family. Williams were a deeply Christian couple that had adopted four children so far and hoped to adopt one more.

But for the Williams, unlike other families, there have been no delays, no waiting lists, no red tape. Why? All the Williams' adopted children were disabled.

One son has Down's Syndrome. The three other children all had major birth defects.

All of the Williams' children were, in the euphemism regularly employed by the adoption agencies, "difficult to place." In a world where virtually every prospective parent dreams of a bright, beautiful, and perfect child, the Williamses have chosen to offer the embrace of love to children no one else wanted.

Here's the point: Friends, when you were adopted, you were NOT on the desirable list. **You were on the "difficult to place" list.**

- You were on the self-centered list.
- You were on the proud list.
- You were on the "has anger issues" list.
- You were on the "has lust issues" list.
- You were on the "has deep wounds and lots of hurts" list.

You were on the difficult and impossible to place list. And yet God predestined you IN LOVE for adoption. (Eph. 1:5).

Illustration #2 of Adoption: David Platt (who also adopted children) in *Follow Me* writes:



Throughout Scripture, God uses the picture of adoption to describe his relationship with his people. This picture became all the more poignant for my wife, Heather, and me when we chose to adopt our first son. We began the process by deciding on the place from which we might adopt. We put a map of the world on the table and we prayed, "Lord, direct us to the child that you desire for us." He led us to adopt internationally from the country of Kazakhstan. I barely knew Kazakhstan existed before this process, but after months of praying, we submitted our application to adopt a Kazakh child...

The parallels between Caleb's story and the gospel story are many, but I want to point out one that is particularly significant. Adoption like this begins with a parent's initiative, not a child's idea. Before Caleb was even born in Kazakhstan, he had a mom and a dad working tirelessly to adopt him. While Caleb was lying alone at night in an orphanage in Kazakhstan, he had a mom and a dad planning to adopt him.

And then one day when Caleb was placed in the arms of his mom and dad, he had no idea all that had been done, completely apart from any initiative in him, to bring him to that point...this precious ten-month-old boy did not invite us to come to him in Kazakhstan to bring him into

our family; he didn't even know to ask for such a thing. No, this orphaned child became our cherished son because of a love that was entirely beyond his imagination and completely outside of his control. He did not pursue us, for he was utterly unable to do so. Instead, we pursued him.

In love, God predestined you for adoption to himself (Eph. 1:5). *It's grace! It's grace! All grace!*

THREE PURPOSES OF ELECTION: sanctification (vs. 4), adoption, (vs. 5), and Praise (vs 6).

Paul ends this small section in vs. 6 with these words: **“to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he blessed us in the Beloved.”**

Third Purpose:

We are elected in Christ by God...so that we might be to the praise of his glorious grace...that for all eternity we might make much of the grace of God!

This is good news. This is praise-worthy news. So don't make it (election) bad news that which Paul celebrates, that which Paul praises God for, that which adopts you into a heavenly family, that for which Paul bows his knees and clasps his hands in prayer.

A right and proper understanding of the election of God rightly ends in an outpouring of glorious praise: **“To the praise of his glorious grace.”**