Ephesians 1:5-6

In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

# Themes in Ephesians We See Here

Paul’s introduction in this letter written to the church in Ephesus introduces us to ideas and themes, one doctrine after another. These doctrines interweave the persons of the Trinity and their relationship with individuals and the bride, the church. These two verses present us with the individual as adopted, but then the grandness of grace poured out to the beloved, the bride of Christ. We see God’s love, which here is a cornerstone concept, but will be built out into an entire building in the last half of chapter 3.

*Why should we be keeping track of the themes of Paul’s writing to the Ephesians?*

The doctrines, when seen as an informed whole by the collection of verses that relate to the topic help us to have a clear understanding of what Paul intended to communicate. We’ll be looking at grace in this particular passage and we’ll see how that comes together not only in Ephesians, but also across Paul and Peter’s epistles.

# In Love

***…In Love…*** *Depending on your translation you may have “in love” in this verse or as part of the last verse. Based on sentence structure it more than likely belongs here in verse 5*

Building on God’s blessing and making us holy and blameless, Paul then expands on these truths with manifestations of God’s love. The love here is agape, benevolent love, meaning it doesn’t come earned, but is given as a gift and reflective of God’s generous character. As this is a cornerstone doctrine of Ephesians we should be clear that God’s love is being shown as an example that we would be able to understand love, see that it gets its definition in Him, and that it is something that is manifested by the Holy Spirit through us as we abide.

*How does Love being from God impact our understanding of the following passage?*

Romans 8:38-39 talk about all of the things that cannot separate us from the love of God. As we understand the love of God we find ourselves absolutely impacted in every way through His expression of care and provision and growth in Christ.

## Predestination

Love led to our being predestined to adoption as sons. All who believe and are in Christ are predestined to adoption. *The problem that often comes up in discussion of predestination is not the fact that we’re predestined (or chosen or called), but what people extrapolate that is not revealed.* The text does not say that outside of Christ the trinity decided to send some people to hell and some people were going to heaven and our wills were violated. Instead the text says that those who believe are in Christ and those who are in Christ are predestined, as a consequence of believing, to be adopted as sons.

This does not present a theological conundrum, but instead focuses on God’s blessing (as articulated in verse 3). If we spend the time to tease out the actual statement the tension goes away. Similarly, the predestination in verse 11 is towards something in verse 12 (the praise of His glory). Romans 8:28-30 presents a similar logical construct wherein being in Christ leads to a series of blessings that build one on top of the other.

*Why is it important that we believe God is sovereign?*

This understanding of predestination is not meant to reduce our view of God’s sovereignty, but is intended to clearly exposit the text as Paul wrote it. God’s sovereignty remains intact, but responsibility for our own belief allows God to preserve accountability for faith in His revealed truth throughout time.

## Adoption as Sons

The theme of being sons is carried on *in contrast* to carnal sons in the rest of Ephesians [2:2, 3:5 and 5:6]. So while we see that this is our adoption as heavenly sons, we need to keep this verse in mind as we study the rest of Ephesians where sonship means something that should not be part of our lives in Christ.

### Adoption in Rome

Paul writes about adoption in the New Testament to places that have a strong Roman presence [c.f. Romans 8:15,23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5]. In the Old testament adoption is observed (Moses and Esther being prominent examples), but the Law doesn’t make specific provisions.

In Rome adoption context

* Adopted children were first in line for inheritance over biological children
* A full heir that could not have their position reversed
	+ First rights to inheritance was secured and no children afterwards could take that right away
* Prior parents’ legal relationship was severed
* The old life was considered gone and a new citizen with a new life was created in the records
* All debts were canceled
* Adoption was rooted in the need to transfer power for Caesar [Augustus Caesar was adopted]
* Ben Hur (the fictional story) includes him being adopted

Imagine if you will, receiving this letter and hearing for the first time – in a culture that treated adoption specially – that you were adopted by God.

## Through Jesus to Himself

*What are the elements of identification that are required for adoption?*

Adoption was provided through the work of Jesus on the Cross. The work on the cross made for a new relationship established in identification, newness of life and type in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 5:) so that we may be adopted as a Christ-like new creation and have all our debts paid (Romans 5:18), been reconciled (Romans 5:10-11), and been made completely acceptable before God to be made sons through adoption.

## According to the Kind Intentions of His Will

There is no alternative way to describe God’s character and His care for us: He is loving and kind. God’s will, His specific, sovereign, will is that all who are in Christ be adopted. No exceptions. His will is for His love and kindness to be express in and to and through us due to Christ and His work on the cross.

# To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace

Paul repeats this phrase in verse 6, 12 and 14 and in each case the glory of His grace is referring to a part of the Trinity.

### To the Praise of the Glory of His Grace

Grace is the unmerited, unlimited blessings of God due to the totally adequate work of Christ on the cross. We get this definition as a compilation of a few passages that talk about grace. The ideas that grace is unmerited and unlimited come from Ephesians 4:7-8 and Romans 5:15 where Christ’s gift of grace is infinite and it is a gift. Grace is a blessing, it is the classical definition of the Greek word charis, but it is a blessing from God because that’s where grace comes from (Acts 13:43, 14:26). The idea that it is due to the totally adequate work of Christ on the cross comes from Romans 5:15. This thing that grace is not focused on is merely covering sin or looking the other way when we sin, but it is completely beyond the focus of sin because of Christ’s work on the cross.

*So, when is grace poured out?*

Grace, God’s blessing, is poured out all the time. Every moment of every day towards every believer. Therefore, all parts of our lives at least indirectly bring glory to God. When we sin, the sin itself does not bring glory, but the grace poured out at that same time bring glory to God. This is why Paul can write in Romans 5:20-6:2 that grace abounds, but we should not keep sinning. We don’t rest in shame and guilt because grace abounds, but we also don’t continue in sin because grace motivates us to live out the life of Christ as we abide.

### A Really, Really Big Doctrinal Implication

What Satan had meant for condemnation: humanity’s sin, has been turned by God into something that, in Christ, has only brought glory to Himself. We don’t worry, we don’t fret, we don’t try to earn God’s love, but instead we rest in His work on our behalf and grow in our knowledge of that very grace (c.f. 2 Peter 3:18) because God took away the eternal consequences of the fall and gave us newness of life.

## Which He Freely Bestowed on Us in the Beloved

*What does it mean for God’s grace to be freely bestowed upon us?*

As believers God’s generosity is a critical element to our understanding of His character. The expression of the Father’s will specifically to bless us with, or bestow upon us, His grace in the beloved is a very specific representation of a relationship that was not previously understood. In the Old Testament the saints were represented as God’s wife (c.f. Ezekiel 16), but their relationship was because of God’s choosing them, yet contingent on their obedience (c.f. Deuteronomy 28&29). In the New Testament our relationship is sealed in Christ[[1]](#footnote-1), and we find here in Ephesians 1:13 (c.f. 4:30) that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This should cause us to understand that being blessed or favored is just how God expresses His love to us.

### In the Beloved

*What does it mean for us to be in the Beloved?*

The Beloved is another reference to Christ (c.f. Colossians 1:13-14), and grace is bestowed or gifted to us in Him. The marriage relationship that this term beloved references is a big theme in Ephesians. As we study moving forward look for words that are wedding, family and ‘bride of Christ’ related.

*When we think about our identification is it singular or plural?*

As believers in the beloved there is a one-another kind of relationship that is also manifested through our relationship to Christ. Ephesians explores this “in the beloved” idea in multiple ways:

1. We are chosen, adopted, an inheritance, and identified together in Christ [and more!]
2. We build each other up in Christ
3. We learn about God’s love in Christ together
4. We are completed together
5. We are the Bride, loved by Christ, together
6. We stand together as a group of soldiers

# Conclusion

There are elements of our faith that are individual, and other elements that are body related. Here in this passage we see a combination of those things: We are individually adopted, and collectively in the Beloved. We are liberated all to a full life in Christ and to the rich blessings of grace, and yet collectively we are to seek each other’s growth (c.f. Ephesians 4:11-12), and looking to be part of God’s manifestation of blessing one to another in Christ. This is not a call to works, but a call to abiding that nothing may hinder us from expressing the very love of God (c.f. Ephesians 3:17-19).

1. In Christ: Romans 3:24, 6:11, 6:23, 8:1-2, Romans 8:38-39, 12:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1:4, 1:30; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 2:14, 5:17; Galatians 1:22, 2:16, 3:28, 5:6; This list is incomplete [↑](#footnote-ref-1)