

WAY OF LIFE
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PAUL'S PRISON EPISTLES
EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS
DAVID W. CLOUD

Paul's Prison Epistles

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Introduction to Paul's Epistles

Paul

Paul is prominent in the early history of the churches. Eighteen of the 28 chapters of the book of Acts are devoted to Paul's ministry. He wrote 14 of the 27 New Testament epistles (if we include Hebrews), 100 of the 260 chapters in the New Testament.

Paul began his life as Saul, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Php. 3:5), apparently named after Israel's first king. He was called Saul of Tarsus, because he was born in Tarsus, the chief city of the Roman province of Cilicia (Ac. 9:11; 22:3). It was "one of the great learning centers of the Eastern World." He was brought up a Pharisee (Php. 3:5), the son of a Pharisee (Ac. 23:6). Educated in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, a prominent rabbi, Saul's expertise was "the law of the fathers," referring to Jewish tradition (Ac. 22:3). He was "exceedingly zealous of the traditions" (Ga. 1:14). This is the vain Jewish tradition that was later incorporated into the Talmud.

Saul was a freeborn Roman citizen (Ac. 22:25-29). He was familiar with pagan literature (Ac. 17:28; Tit. 1:12) and was taught the trade of tent making (Ac. 18:1-3).

Saul persecuted Christians unto death, beginning with his consent to the martyrdom of Stephen (Ac. 7:58; 22:4; Ga. 1:13; 1 Ti. 1:13).

Paul apparently was not impressive in appearance (2 Co. 10:1, 10; 11:6), and he had some sort of eye affliction (Ga. 4:13-15).

Paul was converted in about AD 33 in the midst of his persecuting activity. A large portion of Scripture is devoted to the account of his conversion (Ac 9:1-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-23). On a journey to Damascus, the resurrected Christ appeared to him in a bright light and spoke to him. He fell to the

ground, was stricken with blindness, and was led to Damascus. There he was healed at the hands of Ananias, put his faith in Jesus as the Christ, and was baptized. Paul immediately began to preach Jesus as Christ and the Jews wasted no time in trying to kill him. He escaped by being let down the city wall in a basket (Ac. 9:20-25). He went to Arabia (Ga. 1:17), then to Jerusalem, where he was befriended by Barnabas (Ac. 9:26-28). There the Greek Jews plotted to kill him, and he went to Tarsus (Ac. 9:29-30).

It was at this time that Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Ro. 11:13; Ga. 2:8; 1 Ti. 2:7; 2 Ti. 1:11). At his conversion, the Lord told him that "he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles" (Ac. 9:15). Paul did not include himself among the 12 apostles (1 Co. 15:5-8). Paul was given special grace to be an example to the brethren. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation..." (1 Co. 3:10). "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Co. 15:10). Paul excelled in faith, zeal, patience, labour, love, holiness, surrender, passion, wisdom. Of the apostles and prophets, only Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ" (1 Co. 11:1). See also 1 Co. 4:16; Php. 3:17; 2 Th. 3:9.

Saul began to be called Paul after his conversion (Ac. 13:9) and is called by this name 163 times in the New Testament. He is not called Saul after the first missionary journey in Acts 13-14, except three times when he was recounting his conversion (Ac. 22:7, 13; 26:14). Peter called him "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Pe. 3:15).

When Antioch began to receive the gospel, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and fetched Saul from thence to be his co-laborer in the establishment of that church (Ac. 11:19-26). Barnabas and

Saul traveled to Jerusalem with aid for the brethren who were suffering from a famine (Ac. 11:27-30).

Saul and Barnabas were called by God to be sent out from Antioch as the first foreign missionaries (Ac. 13:1-28). Following are the highlights of the **first missionary journey**:

- They preached on the island of **Cyprus**, where the sorcerer Elymas was smitten with blindness and the Roman deputy Sergius Paulus believed (Ac. 13:4-12).
- They journeyed to **Perga** in the Roman province of Pamphylia, where John left them and returned to Jerusalem (Ac. 13:13).
- They journeyed to **Antioch in Pisidia** where Paul preached in the synagogue and many believed (Ac. 13:14-49). The Jews stirred up persecution and Paul and Barnabas left for Iconium (Ac. 13:50-52).
- At **Iconium** many believed, but the Jews again stirred up persecution (Ac. 14:1-5).
- They preached the gospel in **Lystra and Derbe** in the province of Lycania and elsewhere in that region (Ac. 13:6-7). At Lystra Paul healed a crippled man and the people tried to worship Paul as Mercury and Barnabas as Jupiter (Ac. 14:8-18). The Jews stirred up the people to stone Paul (Ac. 14:19-20).
- They returned to Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Pisidia, and Perga to strengthen the new churches and ordain elders (Ac. 14:21-25).
- They returned to Antioch (Ac. 14:26-27). "And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

Paul and Barnabas attended the conference in Jerusalem to establish the doctrine of salvation by grace alone without the works of the law (Ac. 15).

Ephesians Introduction

The Ancient City of Ephesus

Ephesus was the chief city of the region of Lydia in the Roman province of Asia. During the time of Caesar Augustus it bore the title “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia” (*McClintock and Strong*). It was called “the light of Asia” and “the market of Asia.” “It was considered the most important Greek city and the most important trading center in the Mediterranean region” (*history.com*). It was here that the Roman proconsul or governor of Asia lived. During Paul’s day, Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, with an estimated 200,000 residents (Mark Wilson).

Its prestige and wealth stemmed largely from its situation. It was located on the coast of the Aegean Sea, surrounded by very fertile soil and enjoying an exceptional climate. It had a large artificial harbor, the greatest in Asia, though it was subject to silting and shifting. After centuries of this process the sea has receded and the shore is now six miles away from the ancient city. “Standing at the entrance of the valley which reaches far into the interior of Asia Minor, and connected by highways with the chief cities of the province, Ephesus was the most easily accessible city in Asia, both by land and sea” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

Homes of wealthy Ephesian citizens have been excavated dating to Paul’s time. Some of the expensive wall frescoes and floor mosaics are still intact. It is possible that some of these belonged to Demetrius and his fellow idol makers. “For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen” (Ac. 19:24).

The Celsus Library at Ephesus was the third largest in the Roman Empire (after Alexandria’s and Pergamum’s). It held

around 12,000 scrolls. It was built in the 110s AD by Gaius Julius Aqulia as a monument to his father, former proconsul of Asia Tiberius Julius Celsus. Tiberius was buried in a marble sarcophagus in a crypt beneath the library. It had an elaborate two-story façade with three front entrances accessed by a nine-step staircase. The interior was 2,000 square feet (180 sq. meters). It was a large open room with an upper level balcony overlooking the main floor. Windows lined the second and third levels. The scrolls were protected by a double outer wall. The library featured statues of Sophia (wisdom), Episteme (knowledge), Ennoia (intelligence) and Arete (excellence), depicting the virtues that the user could supposedly obtain by the library's contents. The true source of these things is Jesus Christ, in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3), and the Holy Scripture, which is the revelation of Christ. Paul's epistle to Ephesus alone, just one of the 66 books of the Bible, contains infinitely more wisdom than the entire contents of the Celsus Library in its heyday. The library's interior was destroyed in a fire in AD 262, either by an earthquake or a Gothic invasion, both of which occurred that year, and the façade was destroyed in an earthquake in the tenth or eleventh century. It was restored by archaeologists in the 1970s. Some of the original statues are in museums in Ephesus, Istanbul, and Vienna (where the Museum of Art History holds the statues of Sophia, Episteme, Ennoia, Arete).

Ephesus had a magnificent theater that seated 24,000. It is one of the best-preserved theaters from that era. It was in this theater that the event described in Acts 19:23-41 took place, when the people were stirred up against Paul by the idol-maker Demetrius. The theater was adorned with numerous pagan statues such as Cupid and Nike (also called Victory).

Ephesus featured wide boulevards lined with columns. There was the Marble Way (the *cardo maximus*), the Priests Way

(also called Curetes and Embolos), and the Arcadian Way that ran from the theater to the harbor.

Ephesus was supplied with water from three major aqueducts, one 42 kilometers in length (26 miles), one 20 kilometers (12.5 miles), and another 15 kilometers (9 miles).

When the water reached the city, it was channeled to a distribution building called “CASTELLUM AQUAE” (water castle), which was the major water pipe junction and pressure control mechanism. The water entered the water castle, collected in a reservoir, then routed to pipes to transport the water to fountains, public baths, and houses of the wealthy.

Many of the well-preserved ancient pipes are still visible in the ruins or on exhibition in the museum. They were made of terracotta which is a clay ceramic fired at high temperature. The pipes were glazed for water proofing and durability. Many of the pipes are still waterproof after 2,000 years.

The Ephesus water castle (also called Hydrekdockheion, the Fountain of Laecanius Bassus, and the Nymphaion) had a storage reservoir with a large cistern below ground and a pool above ground. The pool was 12.35 x 8.3 meters (40.5 x 27 feet), 103 square meters (1,090 square feet). The pool was backed on three sides by a richly decorated two-story façade. The statues of Tritons and Muses (sea and river gods) that once adorned the water castle are on display at the Ephesus Museum.

The city had two other major fountains, the Trajan Fountain and the Pollio Fountain. The Pollio featured images of Zeus, the chief Greek god, and Odysseus and Polyphemus of the Trojan War myth. These statues are in the Ephesus Museum.

The city had a sewer system to carry away dirty water and refuse.

Ephesus had a large three-level bathhouse with hot, warm, and cold water. The heating system, called “hypocaust,” was

Ephesians Commentary

I. The believer's position of blessing in Christ

(Eph. 1-3)

Greeting (Eph. 1:1-2)

Paul greets them as “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God” (Eph. 1:1).

- In addressing the church as an apostle, Paul is expressing his authority and is claiming divine inspiration. He is not writing as a mere man. He is writing as a holy prophet. He is writing from God. He is writing mysteries that have been kept secret since the foundation of the world (Eph. 3:1-8). Paul's writings are called “scripture” in 2 Pe. 3:15-16.

- “**Apostle**” is from the Greek *apostolos*, meaning “he that is sent” (Joh. 13:16). The term is used three ways in the New Testament: First, “apostle” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 3:1). The Son was sent from God the Father into this world to purchase redemption for mankind (1 Jo. 4:14). Second, “apostle” refers to the twelve who were chosen by Christ (Lu. 6:13-16). After Judas betrayed the Lord and hung himself, the eleven remaining apostles selected Matthias to replace him (Ac 1:15-26). Paul was chosen later as an apostle to the Gentiles (Ro. 11:13). He did not include himself among the 12 (1 Co. 15:5-8). The apostles saw the resurrected Christ (1 Co. 9:1) and had sign gifts (2 Co. 12:12). Third, “apostle” refers to preachers and missionaries. The Greek *apostolos* is also translated “messenger” (Php. 2:25), referring to the preacher Epaphroditus. See also 2 Co. 8:23. There are apostles today only in this sense. Missionaries are apostles in the sense that they are sent by the churches (“they sent them away,” Ac. 13:3).

- Paul is an apostle “**of Jesus Christ.**” What a high calling! And it is a high calling to be *anything* related to Jesus Christ. His name is the name above every name and all things are under His feet

(Eph. 1:22; Php. 2:9), and to be His redeemed possession, His adopted son, His bride, His ambassador, His priest, is to be exalted with Him.

- Paul is an apostle ***“by the will of God.”*** Paul was chosen by God to be an apostle, as Jeremiah was chosen to be a prophet (Jer. 1:5). This is not calling to salvation, it is calling to service. In Paul’s calling, we see God’s sovereignty over the believer’s life. God chooses the gifts and callings. “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Co. 12:11). There is no room for self-seeking, pride, or jealousy. Every believer is to give full attention to finding and fulfilling his or her calling by surrender, non-conformity to the world, transformation by the renewing of the mind, humility, and diligent service and obedience. See Romans 12.

Paul greets “the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

- The ***“saints which are at Ephesus”*** refers to the church at Ephesus. “Saint” is the Greek *hagios*, which is also translated “holy” (Eph. 1:4) and “sanctified” (1 Co. 1:2). It means set apart for God, God’s possession. “Saint” is one of the most common biblical terms to describe a believer. It is used 62 times in the New Testament and nine times in the Ephesians (Eph. 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18). Every born again believer is a saint positionally by the washing of the blood of Christ (Col. 1:12-14). Having been made holy before God in Christ, the believer is to walk “as becometh saints” in practice (Eph. 5:3). We are holy in Christ (Eph. 1:4), therefore we are to live holy (1 Pe. 1:15).

- ***“the faithful in Christ Jesus”*** is another description of the New Testament believer. This enlarges the address of the epistle to all of the saved in all places. “Faithful” is *pistos*, which has a two-fold meaning; it describes faith in Christ and is translated “believer” (1 Ti. 4:10, 12; 5:16; 6:2) and it describes faithfulness, dependability, trustworthiness (“God is faithful,” 1 Co. 1:9; “it is

required in stewards, that a man be found faithful," 1 Co. 4:2). The child of God has faith in Christ as the means of salvation, and he is faithful as the evidence of salvation.

Paul greets them with ***"grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ"*** (Eph. 1: 2).

- This greeting is repeated in all of Paul's epistles (Ro. 1:7; 1 Co. 1:3; 2 Co. 1:2; Ga. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Php. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:2; 1 Ti. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phm. 1:3).

- It is a statement of truth. Every born again believer has grace and peace from God. It is a statement of the reality of his standing with God because of redemption. Grace and peace is the believer's new standing before God through Jesus Christ. It is not something that is a possibility; it is a reality, a possession. Paul says, "grace be unto you..." To the sinner who comes to God through Christ, God says "Welcome, grace unto you, and peace." Grace and peace from God the Father is to be adopted into God's family, to be a citizen of God's country. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Ro. 5:1-2). Grace and peace is how God looks upon the believer. Grace and peace encapsulates everything the believer has in Christ. Grace and peace is eternal salvation. It is perfect security. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Ro. 8:31). The blessing that is encompassed in these two "little" words is incalculable. The child of God will continue to learn the meaning of these words forever.

- Grace and peace can best be understood by considering what we are by nature in Adam. Before salvation, we are enemies of God because of sin ("when we were enemies," Ro. 5:10). We were separated from God and were under his wrath. "God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry *with the wicked* every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready" (Ps. 7:11-12). "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Ro. 1:18). In Adam, we are "by nature children of wrath" (Eph.

2:1-3). To those in Adam, God's throne is a throne of judgment. But in Christ, we have grace and peace. God's throne of judgment becomes a throne of grace to which we are invited to approach boldly (Heb. 4:16). The golden sceptre is held out in mercy and favor to those who put their trust in Christ (Est. 5:2).

- Grace and peace is also God's provision for the Christian life. It is everything the believer needs to walk with God through this life. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pe. 1:3).

- "**Grace**" is the unmerited blessing of God in Christ. Grace is the free gift of salvation that was purchased by the vicarious atonement of Christ. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Ro. 3:24-25). Grace is a one-word description of salvation. Everything the believer has in Christ is wrapped up in this word. "There is no richer word than the word 'grace,' for it carries in it all of God's love as seen in the gift of His Son for us" (A.T. Robertson). Grace is mentioned before peace, because it is God's grace in Jesus Christ that brings the believer into a position of peace with God.

- "**Peace**" is reconciliation with God. We have peace *from* God because we have peace *with* God through the atonement of Christ. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro. 5:1). What unspeakable blessing it is to be reconciled with Almighty God! In this present world, we only barely begin to understand how big this is.

- We have grace and peace "**from God our Father.**" Trinitarian language permeates the Epistle. There is God the Father (Eph. 1:2), God the Son (Eph. 4:13), and God the holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). The Father is mentioned eight times in Ephesians; He is mentioned in every chapter (Eph. 1:2, 3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23). He is the Father and God of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). We have access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18). We are built for a habitation of God in Christ

through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). We pray to the Father in the name of the Son (Eph. 5:20). It is the Father who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (1 Jo. 4:14). Jesus said, "For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (Joh. 16:27). God is the Father of the redeemed. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Ga. 4:6). In Christ, we can pray, "Our Father which art in heaven..." (Mt. 6:9). What an amazing thing, to have the Almighty Creator God as one's Father! "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jo. 3:2). We can love God as Father; we can rejoice in Him as Father; we can trust Him as Father; we can serve Him as Father. (For more on this see *God the Trinity*, which is available from www.wayoflife.org.)

- We have grace and peace "*from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" He purchased grace and peace for us. He "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Re. 1:5). Note that Jesus Christ is equal to God the Father. These blessings are "from God our Father, AND *from the Lord Jesus Christ.*" It would be blasphemy to mention a mere man in connection with the bestowal of God's blessings. If Paul said, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and *from Paul,*" that would be blasphemy. Paul is a mere man who has no power to bless or curse.

All spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14)

Paul begins the epistle with a magnificent description of the believer's unspeakably rich blessings in Christ. Verses 3-14 is one sentence.

God's blessings in Christ to the believer are from "*the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Eph. 1:3).

- Again, this is Trinitarian language. The Father is the source of the blessings. Christ is the purchaser and mediator of the blessings. The Spirit is the channeler of the blessings. Paul teaches us to address worship and thanksgiving to God the

Father. Christ taught the same thing ("After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name," Mt. 6:9; Lu. 11:2).

The blessings are for "**us**" (Eph. 1:3). This refers to all who have heard the gospel and put their faith in Jesus Christ savingly and are born again, converted. This is clear in the context. First, they are the faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:2), which are those who show evidence of saving faith by a faithful life. Second, they are those who trust in Christ through the gospel and are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:12-13). The sealing of the Spirit and His work in the life is the evidence of saving faith. Third, they are those who have faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints (Eph. 1:15). Again, this is salvation with evidence. Fourth, they are those who are saved by grace through faith without works, which is salvation, and who are saved unto good works which is the evidence (Eph. 2:8-10).

God's blessings in Christ to the believer are accomplished, finished, sure.

- They are present positions, not future possibilities. The participles and verbs pertaining to the blessings ("hath blessed ... hath chosen ... having predestinated ... hath made ... hath abounded") are aorist tense, describing "a mixture of past tense and perfective," something that has been done. "It is used to emphasize that a statement is correct and precise" (Frank Neite). It "emphasizes the certainty of the action" (Bill Mounce).

God's blessings in Christ to the believer is "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

- The blessings are "**all**." This is a description of infinite, all-encompassing blessings. "All" means there is nothing excepting, nothing left out. There is no spiritual blessing that exists now or ever will exist that is not possessed by those who receive the gospel. No one in Old Testament times was ever given such a promise! This is God's blessing to those who receive the gospel

of Jesus Christ in the church age. We are special trophies of His grace.

- The blessings are “*spiritual*,” which are the most important blessings by far. Spiritual blessings are redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, justification, peace, adoption, resurrection, eternal life, eternal glory. To have spiritual blessings is also to have all physical blessings eventually, but to have all physical blessings in this present world without the spiritual blessings in Christ is to have nothing of real value.

- These blessings are “*in Christ*.” The phrases “in Christ,” “in him,” “in whom,” and “in the beloved” are repeated 20 times in Ephesians 1-3. To be in Christ is salvation. It is to be in Christ positionally. It is a new spiritual standing before God. Man’s natural condition is “in Adam” (1 Co. 15:22). In Adam, man is unrighteous, separated from God, condemned already, dead in trespasses and sins, a child of wrath, a slave to the devil, on the path to eternal judgment. In Christ, the believer’s condemnation is erased because of Christ’s atonement and he has all spiritual blessings before God.

- These blessings are “*in heavenly places in Christ*.” This is *epouránios*, from *epi* (upon, in) and *ouranós* (heaven). “Heaven” is used in three ways in Scripture: of the sky (Mt. 6:26, *ouranos* is translated “air”; Lu. 17:24; Jas. 5:18), of the place of the stars (Mr. 13:25), and of God’s dwelling place, which is the third heaven (2 Co. 12:2). Heaven is the place of the Father’s throne (Mt. 5:34) and temple (Re. 11:19). The Father is called the “heavenly Father” (Mt. 18:35) and “our Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). In heaven are an innumerable company of angels and the general assembly and church of the firstborn (Heb. 12:22). Heaven is where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20). Our salvation pertains to heaven. The gift of salvation is a heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4). Our calling is a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1). Our kingdom is a heavenly kingdom (2 Ti. 4:18). The resurrection body is a heavenly body (1 Co. 15:49; 2 Co. 5:1). We are already seated in heaven in Christ (Eph. 1:20; 2:6). Our inheritance is reserved in heaven (1 Pe. 1:4). Our hope is in heaven (Col. 1:5). Our life is hid with Christ in heaven (Col.

3:1-3). In Colossians 3, we see that we are to set our affection upon heaven and to be watching for the return of Christ from heaven.

God's blessings in Christ to the believer is to be "chosen in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

- "**Chosen**" is *eklego*, from *ek* (out) and *lego* (to choose, select). *Eklektos*, from *eklego*, is translated "elect" (1 Pe. 1:2). God has chosen or elected some sinners to be holy and without blame before him in love.

- Who are the "chosen" and what is the basis of their being chosen? This is not answered in verse 4, but it is answered in the context. The chosen are those who hear the gospel and put their trust in Christ (Eph. 1:12-13). They are chosen or elect according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Pe. 1:2). The Bible nowhere teaches that God chooses or elects some sinners on the basis of a "sovereign decree" without reference to their faith in Christ. In fact, this Augustinian theology is plainly refuted by Scripture. It is God's will that all men be saved (1 Ti. 2:3-4), that none perish, and that all repent (2 Pe. 3:9). Christ gave himself a ransom for all (1 Ti. 2:5-6). He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 Jo. 2:2). The iniquity of all was laid upon Him (Isa. 53:6). God loves the world and sent Christ to be the Saviour of the world (Joh. 3:16-17; 1 Jo. 4:14), and the term "world" never refers to the elect. The gospel is to be offered to all sinners (Mr. 16:15). It is God's will that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life (Joh. 6:40). It is God's will that all who hear the gospel and believe have eternal life (Joh. 6:40). It is God's will that all who receive Christ by believing on His name become the sons of God (Joh. 1:12-13). The Gospel of John was written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Joh. 20:31). The gospel of Christ is for "whosoever believeth" (Joh. 3:15, 16; 4:14; 11:26; 12:46; Ac. 10:43; Ro. 9:33; 10:11), "whosoever shall call (Ro. 10:13), and and "whosoever will" (Re. 22:17). The gospel is "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all

and upon all them that believe" (Ro. 3:22). "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Co. 1:21). This is God's good pleasure and sovereign will in regard to salvation and election. It is taught in simple words by a large body of Scripture and cannot be overthrown by any isolated Scripture.

- When were they chosen? They were chosen "***before the foundation of the world***" (Eph. 1:4). God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:9-10). He knows all His works from the beginning of the world (Ac. 15:18). Nothing will ever happen that God does not already see. He saw every person and every thought and action before the world was made. God has given man a will which can be exercised within the boundaries of God's choosing. "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Ac. 17:26-27). That man can reject God and resist God's will within these boundaries is clear throughout Scripture. God has incorporated man's will and man's actions within His eternal plan and has ultimate control over all things.

- To what are they chosen? They are chosen to "***be holy and without blame before him in love***." They are not chosen to be saved; they are not chosen to faith in Christ; they are chosen to an exalted position before God in Christ when they do believe. They are chosen to be "***holy***." In Christ, the believing sinner is holy before God positionally. Before salvation, he is unholy, unrighteous, unclean. In Christ, he has the very righteousness of Christ put to his account; he is cleansed; he is holy. They are chosen to be "***without blame***." Before salvation, the sinner is guilty, under God's judgment, condemned already, a child of wrath. In Christ, the believing sinner is "blameless and unreprouvable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). Believers are chosen to be "***before him in love***." God planned the redemption of sinners because of His love for them. In Christ, there is nothing to hinder the outworking of God's love to the believer. We are loved

by the God who is love (1 Jo. 4:8) and whose love passeth knowledge (Eph. 3:19). All of the redeemed join their voices together in praise “unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Re. 1:5).

God’s blessings in Christ to the believer is to be “predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5).

- The believer is chosen to be holy and without blame and is predestinated unto the adoption of children. “*Predestinate*” is *proorízo*, from *pro* (before) and *horízo* (to determine). It is translated “determined before” (Ac. 4:28) and “ordained” (1 Co. 2:7). We see that predestination is not to predetermine *who* will be saved; it is to predetermine *to what* they are saved. It is God’s sovereign will and determination that all who hear the gospel and receive it will be adopted as His children. Compare Jesus’ words in John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name.” Those who hear the gospel and trust Christ savingly are predestined to be adopted as children of God, predestined to an eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:11), predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Ro. 8:29). “*Predestination*, which means ‘marked out,’ is nowhere found in connection with the Gospel, nor does it say anywhere in the Word, what some have said, that God has predestinated human beings to be lost. But while we do not read that He ever predestinated anyone to be lost, we read that God ‘would have all men to be saved’ (1 Ti. 2:4). God has nothing to say to a lost world about predestination. His grace, bringing salvation has appeared unto all men. God’s offer of salvation is therefore to all. ... ‘Whosoever will’ and ‘Whosoever believeth’ are the glorious terms of God’s good news to all alike. ... Those who have believed on Christ are predestinated and they possess the Son-place. Then having believed, we know that we were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” (Arno Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*).

- “Adoption” is *huiiothesía*, from *huios* (son) and *tithemi* (to place). Adoption “signifies the place and condition of a son

given to one to whom it does not naturally belong" (Vine). "The apostle here uses as an illustration the Roman practice of legally adopting a child, and thus not only bequeathing to him the material possessions of the one adopting, but also giving him his civil status. Thus God takes a believing sinner, regenerates him, and by means of this makes him His child (teknon, a born one). Then He takes this child and places him in a legal position as an adult son (huios)" (Wuest). "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Ga. 4:4-5). Adoption is the work of the Spirit. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Ga. 4:6); "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Ro. 8:15-16). The adoption is to be a joint-heir with Christ which refers to unspeakable, incalculable glory and riches. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Ro. 8:17).

- Adoption is **"by Jesus Christ."** The sinner has nothing with God or in God apart from Jesus Christ, the only Saviour and Mediator. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Ac. 4:12).

- Adoption is "according to the good pleasure." "Good pleasure" is eudokía, from eudokéo, from eu (well) and dokeo (to seem), which means to have pleasure in something, someone, or some purpose. It is translated "seemed good" (Mt. 11:26), "good will" (Lu. 2:14), "desire" (Ro. 10:1), "well pleased" (Mt. 3:17), "willing" (2 Co. 5:8), "thought it good" (1 Th. 3:1), "pleasure" (2 Th. 2:12). We see that God has pleasure. He is a personal God, not an unfeeling, impersonal power or intelligence. God has pleasure in the salvation of sinners. It pleased God to save those who hear the gospel and believe (1 Co. 1:21). It is the Father's pleasure to give the kingdom to Christ's disciples (Lu. 12:32), to

adopt them as sons (Eph. 1:5), to reveal His eternal purposes to them (Eph. 1:9). God is pleased that all things will be one in Christ. God is pleased that all things that do not submit to Christ will be rooted out of His kingdom. God is especially pleased with His Son. This is stated three times in the Gospel of Matthew ("in whom I am well pleased," Mt. 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). It pleased the Father that all fullness would dwell in Christ (Col. 1:19). God's pleasure is the chief purpose of the creation. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Re. 4:11).

- Adoption is "**according to ... his will**." It is God's sovereign, divine will that all who trust in Christ be adopted as sons. This is in accordance with the teaching of the entire New Testament. Paul said it is God's will that all sinners be saved ("who would have all men to be saved," 1 Ti. 2:3). Peter said that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pe. 3:9). Christ said that it is God's will that every sinner who hears the gospel and believes on the Son has everlasting life. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Joh. 6:40). "For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Joh. 3:16). The apostle John said, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 Jo. 5:11-12).

- "From all eternity, God has had our well-being in mind. His eternal purpose was to bring into existence human beings upon whom He could bestow all the inexhaustible riches of His grace. ... What God has in store for us is beyond anything we can imagine. We find ourselves yearning for it at times with deep soul-longings that are beyond all utterance. We catch occasional, fleeting glimpses of that 'sweet bye and bye' in a passage or two of Scripture, such as those in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse, although the reality will be far better, as Paul put it

in Philippians 1:23. In the meantime we can rest assured that God has taken care of our inheritance. That part of our salvation is included in God's predestinating will" (John Phillips).

- The practice of adoption in the Roman Empire illustrates spiritual adoption in some fundamental ways. A wealthy Roman citizen could adopt a young man who would become an heir of the man's position and property. Many of the emperors were adopted sons. Julius Caesar adopted Gaius Octavius, a grandnephew, who became the emperor Gaius Julius Caesar, also called Augustus Caesar. He was the emperor when Jesus was born (Lu. 2:1). Other emperors who were adopted sons were Scipio Africanus the Younger, Tiberius, Germanicus, Gaius Caligula, Nero, Pliny the Younger, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, and Constantius I.

Consider six aspects of Roman adoption that illustrate spiritual adoption: (1) ***A slave could be adopted by a two-step process.*** First he had to be freed and made a citizen, then he could be adopted. Publius Helvius Pertinax, the son of a slave, became emperor. His birth name was Alba Pompeia. Likewise, the believer was a slave to sin and the devil, but he has been freed and made a citizen of heaven and adopted by God. (2) ***The old life of the adoptee was completely erased.*** The past life was gone. All debts were cancelled. This is exactly what happens to the believer. "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Co. 5:17). (3) ***The adopted son's family name was changed to that of the new father*** (e.g., Gaius Octavius became Gaius Julius Caesar). This will be true for the believer. "And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads" (Re. 22:4). (4) ***The adopted son became an heir to the new father's estate.*** Even if natural sons were born afterwards, the adopted son's status as an heir could not be changed. Likewise, the believer is an heir to God and a joint-heir with Christ. (5) ***The adopted son was placed under the new father's authority.*** He was not independent. A father under Roman law had *patria potestas* ("power of a father"), which means he had absolute authority over his family. His sons, regardless of their age, remained under *patria potestas*. All family property,

including that earned by the children, was under the father's authority. The father's authority only ended with his death. Likewise, the believer is under the Father's authority and has no independent life, and this status is eternal since God cannot die!

(6) *The adopted son assumed the responsibilities of the new family. Its business became his business.* Likewise, the believer is to take up the business of God in this present world, which is the business of the Great Commission. It is the business of planting and harvesting and building churches (1 Co. 3:6-12). **On the other hand, in the following two ways Roman adoption was in contrast to spiritual adoption: (1) *Roman adoptions were not for the purpose of compassion.*** Needy orphans were not adopted. "Overall, the culture of the Romans had little compassion for the needs of children, and their laws reflected this attitude. This uncompassionate view toward children was borne out in the grim truth that babies were often aborted or exposed [to die] in first century times by Greco-Roman families. This happened especially when families were unable to support more children. These children usually ended up either dying or being taken to be raised as slaves in other households" (Baina King, "Adoption in New Testament Times," Liberty University, 2005). In contrast, God's adoption is an act of love for needy sinners. **(2) *Adoptees could be unadopted by the process of emancipation and thus lose all of their rights.*** In contrast, God will never un-adopt one of his adopted children. The adoption is eternal. The inheritance is reserved in heaven (1 Pe. 1:3-4).

God's blessings in Christ to the believer is "*to the praise of the glory of his grace*" (Eph. 1:6).

- The free salvation of sinners by grace through the sacrifice of His own Son will be to the praise of God's glory forever. "Glory" here means praise. This is stated four times in Ephesians in various ways. "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12). "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14). "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). The salvation of wretched sinners who deserve

nothing but eternal judgment shows every aspect of God's character, particularly His love, wisdom, and power, but also His kindness, goodness, gentleness, longsuffering, mercy, truth, justice, faithfulness, fatherly pity, etc.

- This is why God allowed the rebellion of Lucifer and Adam. He is teaching angels and men the greatness of His character. He is teaching things about Himself that were not previously known and could not otherwise be known than through redemption's plan. Angels desire to look into these things (1 Pe. 1:12).

- In the ages to come, there will be no rebels, but the citizens of the new heaven and new earth will be taught God's character by the redemption of rebels. After the final rebellion and the Great White Throne judgment, all rebels will be cast into the lake of fire to suffer with the devil, for whom it was made (Re. 20:7-15; Mt. 15:22). In the new heaven and new earth, there will never again be a rebellion. It will be inhabited by redeemed Israel and the redeemed of the Church and "the nations of them which are saved" (Re. 21:24). The record of the rebellion era will be found in God's Book, the Bible, and the nations will doubtless be taught out of it. The Church will be God's special exhibit of grace even beyond Israel. Israel will certainly be a trophy of God's grace, but Israel has promises and covenants that the Church does not have. Christ "naturally" belongs to Israel, but not to the Gentiles. To Israel "*pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*" (Ro. 9:4-5). Those saved by the gospel in the church age are taken out from among the Gentiles to be "a people for his name" (Ac. 15:14). They were previously "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). What great grace God has shown to these people, that they might be freely forgiven, cleansed, regenerated, justified, sanctified, blessed with all spiritual blessings, made a royal priesthood and joint-heirs with, and the very bride of, Christ!