

Sermon Notes: *Predestined to Adoption* (Ephesians 1:5).

Intro: J. I. Packer: “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father.” This great truth made Paul rejoice.

#1: Adopted because of our Father’s grace. Six times this verb “predestined” appears in the NT. In each case it refers only to God determining in advance the destiny of individuals (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11). Here, Paul says God determined in advance that we should be his children and members of his family. Is there a difference between our predestination and our election which Paul referred to back in verse 4? People often use the terms interchangeably to mean the same thing. But while it is true that they do refer to the same doctrine the meanings are slightly different. To “elect” means to choose individuals for a purpose. To predestinate to accomplish that purpose for which the individuals were chosen. Nothing so emphasizes that we are God’s children not through nature but through his pure grace! Paul qualifies God’s predestinating grace so that we get the point! Unconditional grace. The ESV and RSV say God predestined us according to his “purpose” but other translations more correctly say it was according to his “pleasure.” God takes great delight in his plans and in predestining his elect to adoption. But why did God so choose and predestine *me*? The only answer possible is “It *pleased* God to do so.” But surely there must be some other reason?! Did he see a spark of goodness in my heart? Or that I was the kind of person who would trust him? No. How muddle-headed such thinking is! I was the kind of person who was dead in my sins, without hope, and at enmity with God (Eph. 2:1ff)! There was nothing about me that “made” God love, choose, and predestine me. God loved me according to his grace and the ultimate reason for God’s grace lies within himself. It “pleased” God to show me grace in spite of my sins when he might just as well have condemned me for them as I richly deserve! Grace unconditional and free. Invincible grace. God’s predestinating grace was according to his “will.” This is simply to say that sinful men owe their salvation completely to the invincible triumphant grace of God (Jn 1:13). As I struggle with sin, the unbelieving world and the devil, it comes as a great comfort to know that God is invincibly and irreversibly committed to making me like Jesus. His electing and predestinating grace mean that God does not treat every sinner the same. Jesus appeared to the enemy of the church, Paul, on the road to Damascus and overcame his unbelief right there, but he did not do so for Pontius Pilate. Do you harbor the idea within your heart that the reason why you received Christ but your neighbor rejected him is because you were somehow more righteously disposed toward obeying the gospel than your neighbor? Of course not! The gospel truth which Paul is jealous to protect is that God saves sinners who neither want to be saved nor can save themselves. God graciously chooses and loving predestines to adoption those who are spiritually blind, deaf, and dead in their sin. Even some of the worst. To the glory of his grace! Why not you?

#2: Adopted through our Savior’s work. The Bible defines salvation in different ways (justification, redemption, etc.). but our adoption through Christ is the highest. I am not simply a justified sinner or redeemed slave, but an adopted orphan. How rich our relationship with God. Three great blessings implied: New family status. Paul is the only person in the Bible who pictures salvation as “adoption.” Since he uses it only when writing to churches in areas under Roman law (Galatia, Ephesus, Rome), he’s apparently borrowing this picture from its practice in Roman society. In Paul’s world, unlike ours, adoption was ordinarily of young adult males of

good character to become heirs and carry on the family name of the childless rich. It was accompanied by a radical change of status. Old family allegiances were abolished and new ones established. One's former debts were even wiped out! How much greater our adoption! In the Roman world men of noble character were adopted but the gospel says sinners of ignoble character are adopted by the God of glory! He was unwilling to spare his noble and much loved Son Jesus to adopt ignoble but much loved sinners. How greater our change of status! The infinite debt of my sin has been cancelled by the payment of the Son's blood (Col 2:14). Not only has the debt of my sin been paid but its authority broken. No longer am I a son of darkness but of light. No longer a son of disobedience but of obedience by the Spirit of adoption (Eph 5:1; cf. Rom 6:17). New family privileges. Given me the signet ring of his name—the indwelling Spirit. He assures me of my final inheritance (1:14). He assures me of having bold access to my Father through the merits of Christ's blood because of God's electing/predestinating love. New family duties. Roman adoption, unlike contemporary practice, was for the benefit of the adopter not the adoptee. Similarly, our highest joy must consist not merely in pleasing ourselves but our Father who has made us co-heirs with Christ at the cost of his blood!