



SBAOC Weekly Update

NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

- Thank you for sharing our need and prayer request concerning the roof for our Fremont Church plant. We have a praise to share! I received an email from a couple who heard of the need through SBAOC and committed to pay for the entire roof replacement! Praise God! Thank you all for praying! Lyn Hansen, North Park Church, Columbus, Nebraska
- Mark your calendar! *Saved By Faith Youth Camp* will be June 15-19. Registration information will be available in February at www.sbfyckansas.com.

If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please email the information to spurgeonassociation@gmail.com or call us at 785-456-8513.

THE BLESSING OF GOD'S NEW PEOPLE: A DOXOLOGY

(Ephesians 1:3-6)

By Curtis Vaughan

Most of Paul's epistles begin with an expression of thanks to God for certain spiritual qualities produced by divine grace and power in the readers' lives (cf Rom. 1:8ff.; 1 Cor. 1:4ff.; Phil. 1:3ff.; Col1:3ff., et al.). Ephesians, however, is different. Here, instead of the customary thanksgiving, there is what more appropriately may be called a doxology—a majestic hymn of praise to God. (The thanksgiving, to be sure, is eventually brought in [cf. 1:15], but, as Robinson says, "not until the great doxology has run its full course" [p. 23].)

This outburst of adoring praise requires and rewards the closest study. Two matters should be considered before we attempt to interpret it. The first is its *structure*. In the Greek text verses 3-14 constitute one magnificent sentence intricately and skillfully put together. The KJV, to help the reader keep the connection of thought, places a period at the end of verses 6, 12 and 14. Following this punctuation, one may think of Paul's inspired hymn as falling into three stanzas. The first (vss. 3-6) relates to the past and centers largely in the gracious purpose of the Father. The second (vss. 7-12) has to do with the present and revolves mainly around the redemptive work of Christ. The third (vss. 13, 14) points to the future consummation of redemption and magnifies the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Each stanza closes with a refrain: "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (vs. 6), "to the praise of His glory" (vs. 12), "unto the praise of His glory" (vs.14).

The second matter to consider is the *theme*. The entire passage, throbbing with a sense of the majesty and goodness of God, may be seen as an ascription of praise to Him for His gracious benefits to His people. This note, which resounds throughout the paragraph, is first struck in verse 3: "Blessed be ... God, ... who hath blessed us

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PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon

COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

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For my own part, I consider the Lord's Day as mainly intended for strengthening our impression of invisible and eternal things; for cultivating a spirit of love to God, and to our fellow-creatures; for devising and promoting plans for the glory of God, and the happiness of man; and, in short, for securing the great object of our everlasting welfare, which the Scriptures teach us depends on the use we make of this probationary state.

William Wilberforce

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with all spiritual blessings." Notice the joyous and emphatic reiteration: "blessed," "hath blessed," "blessings." It is reminiscent of Psalm 103: "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless The LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (vss. 1, 2).

"Blessed" translates an adjective used in the New Testament exclusively of God. (Cf., e.g., Mark 14:61; Luke 1:68; Rom. 9:5; 2 Cor. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3.) The inference is that He alone has an unchanging claim on our homage. In "blessing" God we do not, of course, add anything to Him or bestow any benefit on Him. We simply acknowledge His mercy and offer praise and thanks to Him for His goodness to us. The Greek word means "to be praised," "worthy of praise." "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NIV).

"Hath blessed" translates a verb the tense of which sums up all the blessings of God and treats them as a single whole. The primary reference appears to be to those blessings that come to the believer in his experience of conversion, but the concept is broad enough to include every act of divine blessing.

Our blessing (praising) of God, it is implied, is in response to the blessings (benefits) we have received from Him. Those blessings are described in verses 3-6, and some of the principal ones are enumerated in verses 7-14.

A Description of the Divine Blessings (1:3-6)

One of the richest and most overwhelming passages in the Bible is this discussion of the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. Calvin speaks of the "lofty terms" employed and explains that they are intended to rouse believers' hearts to gratitude, "to set them all on flame, to fill them even to overflowing with this disposition."

1. *Their Character* (vs. 3). God has blessed us "with all spiritual blessings" (vs. 3). Some think the word "spiritual" is used to emphasize that our blessings are derived from the Spirit and communicated to us by Him. These blessings do, of course, come from the Spirit, and are realized in us only through His work, but it is doubtful that the apostle had this in mind in using the word "spiritual." Paul's term emphasizes, not the source of our blessings, but their nature. That is, they are spiritual rather than natural or material. Paul, a childless, landless, homeless man, knew little of material blessings, but in regard to things spiritual he knew himself to have boundless wealth. The contemplation of these blessings opened in his heart the floodgates of grateful praise.

"All spiritual blessings" is taken by some to mean that there is no spiritual blessing that we have that does not come from God. This is of course true, but perhaps it is better to understand the word in the sense of "every kind of." Whatever our spiritual lives require, God amply and abundantly provides. He has given us "every possible benefit in Christ!" (vs. 3, Phillips).

2. *The Sphere in Which they Are Experienced* (vs. 3). Two expressions define the sphere in which God's people are blessed. One is the phrase "in the heavenly places" (vs. 3; literally, "in the heavenlies"). This unusual expression occurs five times in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12, ASV) but nowhere else in the New Testament. To determine its meaning, one should study carefully each passage where it is used. In 1:20 it is the sphere to which the risen Christ has been exalted and enthroned; in 2:6 it is the region to which believers have been lifted in fellowship with Christ; in 3:10 it is where principalities and powers learn of the wisdom of God as exhibited through His people; in 6:12 it is the spiritual battleground where believers confront the forces of wickedness. It appears, then, that the phrase "heavenly places" refers not to a physical locality but to a

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

True Church Conference—
February 20-23, 2020. Speakers:
Justin Peters, Tom Nettles, Tom
Ascol, David Miller, Jono Sims, &
Jeff Noblit. "The Pretenders:
Unmasking the Tragedy of
Unregenerate Church
Membership."
truechurchconference.com

**Midwest Founders Conference
25th Anniversary—**"Union with
Christ". February 25 & 26, 2020.
First Baptist Church of Fenton.
Speakers: Dr. Greg Gilbert, Dr.
Curtis McClain, Dr. Terry
Chrisope, Dr. Bob Curtis. Register
online at: <http://sbfcmw.com>

Grace Bible Conference—April
24-26. Rockport Baptist Church,
Arnold, MO. "Walking with
Christ." The SBAOC spring
meeting will be held in
conjunction with this
conference.

**2020 Saved By Faith Youth
Camp—**June 15-19. Webster
Conference Center, Salina,
Kansas. [https://
www.sbfyckansas.com/](https://www.sbfyckansas.com/)



Check out the
"SBFYC Official"
YouTube channel to
watch the 2019
sessions.

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realm or region of spiritual reality to which the believer has been lifted in Christ. That is to say, it speaks not of the heaven of the future but of the heaven that lies within and around the Christian here and now. Believers do indeed belong to two worlds (Phil. 3:20). Temporally they belong to the earth; but spiritually their lives are linked with Christ's, and they therefore belong to the heavenly realm.

The other phrase defining the sphere of Christian blessings is "in Christ" (vs. 3). The thought occurs no fewer than twelve times in the first fourteen verses of this Epistle. Believers are faithful in Christ (vs. 1), chosen in Him (vs. 4), receive grace in Him (vs. 6), have their redemption in Him (vs. 7), are made a heritage in Him (vs. 11, ASV), are sealed in Him (vs. 13), and so on. Here (vs. 3) where it said that God's people are blessed in Christ, the meaning is that the blessings they experience come to them by virtue of their union with Christ. He is the great reservoir of blessing, but only those who have living connection with Him share in His benefits. To those, however, who do enjoy this vital union God gives the key to His treasures and says in effect, "Go in and take what you will."

3. *The Ground on Which They Come* (vss. 4--6). These blessings come to us in accordance with an eternal purpose of God. He "hath blessed us ... according as [i.e., in conformity with the fact that] he hath chosen us" (vss. 3, 4). The suggestion is that divine election is the source and ground of all our spiritual benefits.

If you have ever watched a surveyor checking property lines where new houses were to be built, you know how very careful he must be about where he places his transit instrument. This is because the exact point-of-being must be located before any surveying can be done. If the point-of-being is wrong, property lines will be confused, houses will be misplaced, and the courts will be flooded with people protesting the violation of their property rights. So important is this that builders refuse to begin their work until the survey is completed.

The present passage deals with the point-of-being in spiritual matters—both for the individual Christian and for the whole body of Christ—and traces it back to eternity, to the sovereign will of God.

The two key expressions are "hath chosen" (vs. 4) and "having predestinated" (vs. 5). Since all else in the passage revolves around these two ideas, it is absolutely necessary that we understand their meanings. "Hath chosen" means that God has chosen Christians to be His people, to be the means of carrying out His purpose in the world. The root meaning of the Greek word is "to pick out" or "select" (for oneself). It is used in various connections in the New Testament—for example, of Christ's choice of the apostles (Luke 6:13), of the early church's choice of deacons (Acts 6:5), and of the selection of official delegates by the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:22, 25). In the present passage, where the word relates specifically to God's selection of sinners for salvation and service, there is a connotation of kindness and love.

"Having predestinated," the other focal term in our passage, translates a Greek word that literally means "to mark off in advance" (cf. Knox, "marking us out beforehand"). The idea is that of determining in advance. Other renderings are "predestined" (NIV), "destined" (TCNT, RSV, NEB), "planned" (Phillips), and "foreordained" (ASV). In the New Testament it is always used of God as determining from eternity (cf. Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29; 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11). Probably no rigid distinction should be drawn between the choosing and the predestinating (foreordaining); they relate to the same divine act and, for all

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practical purposes, are identical.

Both of these expressions ("hath chosen," "having predestinated") are key terms for what is known as the doctrine of election. This doctrine, in a broad sense, may be defined as an act of choice whereby God selects an individual or a group out of a larger company for a purpose or destiny that He appoints. In a more restricted sense, it is God's gracious and sovereign choice of individual sinners to be saved in and through Christ. We cannot fully comprehend the ways of God, but we may be sure that in His wisdom He knows that this was the way whereby the greatest possible blessing would eventually come to the largest number of persons.

This principle of selection has characterized God's dealings with the race from the beginning. For example, He chose Abraham from among all the other men in Ur; He chose Isaac rather than Ishmael and the other sons of Abraham; He chose Jacob rather than Esau; He selected Israel over all other nations of the earth and made them His "chosen people." Other examples could be cited, but these are enough to show that Paul was not teaching a new doctrine. What he does assert is that God has chosen a new people, and this has been done without regard to geographical or racial distinctions.

The doctrine receives great emphasis in Paul's Epistles, (cf. Rom. 8:28-11:36; 1 Thess.1:2-10), but it is not peculiar to him. The New Testament uniformly teaches that all saving grace in time flows from divine election in eternity (cf. John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; 1 Peter 1:1, 2). The teaching is often brought in (as it is in the present passage) in contexts of praise and devotion and is intended to elicit the adoring gratitude of redeemed people.

The doctrine of election is often vigorously opposed. Sometimes this opposition arises from a misunderstanding of the doctrine. Sometimes it represents a reaction to those who have made the teaching harsh and forbidding. Often, however, the prejudice against election is an expression of imbedded conceit, for this teaching deals a crushing blow to human pride. It is indeed a leveling doctrine, stripping away all trust in flesh and bringing men to see that their only hope is the grace of God in Christ.

The KJV attaches the phrase "in love" to the thought in verse 4: "that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." Many interpreters favor placing the mark of punctuation before "in love" and construing these words with "having predestinated" (vs. 5). The RSV, for instance, has a period after the phrase "before him," then makes verse 5 read: "He destined us in love to be his sons though Jesus Christ "God's predestinating is thus seen to be no harsh and arbitrary act, but rather a gracious and merciful decree *made in love*. It is to be thought of, then, not as a blind, impersonal, and mechanical thing, but as an act of infinite

goodness and wisdom. In light of this, the expression of worship and wonder that closes Paul's most detailed and profound discussion of divine election is a fitting response for all of us: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

Five things about election (the divine choice) are brought out in the present passage. First, *it has its ground in Christ*.¹ God chose us "in him" (vs. 4). The thought is that apart from Christ and His foreseen work on our behalf there would have been no election and, therefore, no salvation. Since, therefore, the redemption of sinners is bound up so intimately with the person and work of God's Son, no one should think of himself as one of God's elect unless he knows himself to be in Christ. "Do not conceive," said Spurgeon, "that some decree, passed in the dark ages of eternity, will save your souls, unless you believe in Christ. Do not ... fancy that you are to be saved without faith That is a most abominable and accursed heresy, and has ruined thousands. Lay not election as a pillow for you to sleep on, or you may be ruined" (p. 82).

Second, God's choice was made "*before the foundation of the world*" (vs. 4). That is to say, it was an eternal choice; it was made before any created thing came into being, indeed, before time began. The New Testament appears to emphasize this fact in order to bring out that God's choice is immutable, that nothing can happen in time or eternity to shake His determination to save His people. God's purpose cannot miscarry, nor can they be checkmated.

Third, God's choice was *purposeful*. This truth is brought out in two statements. The first, "that we should be holy and without blame before him" (vs. 4), expresses the purpose of divine election as to our character. God wanted us to be a certain kind of people: He wanted us to be holy (i.e., separated to Him); He wanted us to be blameless. The two words really express two sides of the same thing.

Barclay points out that the word *holy*, which speaks in this context of inner consecration, has in it "the idea of *difference* and of *separation*." His comments are significant. "A temple," he explains, "is *holy* because it is different from other buildings; a priest is *holy* because he is different from ordinary men; a [sacrificial] victim is *holy* because it is different from other animals; God is supremely *holy* because He is different from men; the Sabbath day is *holy* because it is different from other days. So, then, God chose the Christian that he should be *different* from other men" (p. 89). This difference consists in his separation, his dedication to God.

The word that is translated "without blame" is sometimes used of blamelessness in character and conduct (cf. especially the Septuagint rendering of the Psalms), but essentially it is a sacrificial term. In reference to sacrificial

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animals it meant "without blemish" or "without defect." In the New Testament, where the word occurs eight times, it is used in various contexts. For example, it is used of Christ, who "offered himself *without spot* to God" (Heb. 9:14) and whose blood was like that "of a lamb *without blemish*" (1 Peter 1:19); of Christians, who are to show themselves to be "children of God *without blemish*" in the midst of an evil generation (Phil. 2:15, ASV); and of the church, which as Christ's bride is one day to be presented to Him "holy and *without blemish*" (Eph. 5:27; cf. Col. 1:22; Jude 24). The root meaning of the word is "flawless." In the present passage Paul uses it to denote the stainless life that God purposes for His people to live.

The second statement of the purpose is put in terms of our standing before God: "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ" (vs. 5). Adoption embraces more than our relationship to God as His children. This relationship we have by the new birth. Used in the New Testament only by Paul, the Greek word for "adoption" literally means a "placing as sons." (Compare ASV, "adoption as sons"; NAB, "his adopted sons".) Once (Rom. 9:4) Paul uses it of the covenant relationship between Israel and God (cf. Exod. 4:12), but everywhere else he uses it to emphasize the privileges that belong to believers. The complete manifestation of our adoption and the full realization of its privileges are yet future (Rom. 8:23).

This adoption is further defined as "unto ... himself" (vs. 5). The sense is that God Himself is the one to whom believers are brought into a filial relationship through adoption. Thus the phrase is practically equivalent to a possessive pronoun. Compare RSV: "He destined us in love *to be his sons* through Jesus Christ" (italics mine). The further intent of the phrase is to emphasize the glory and wonder of our adoption.

Fourth, the divine election is "*according to the good pleasure of his will*" (vs. 5). This means that the reason for God's choice, for His foreordaining us to be His children, is not to be found in us but in His own goodness and in the deliberate resolve of His own mind. F. F. Bruce explains: "It was not because He foreknew that we would believe the gospel, that He singled us out for such an honour as this. The ground must be sought exclusively in His own gracious character" (pp. 29, 30). The Greek word for "good pleasure," found three times in the Gospels (Matt. 11:26; Luke 2:14; 10:21), six times in the writings of Paul (Rom. 10:1; Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 1:15; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:11), and nowhere else in the New Testament, suggests a gracious purpose or resolve. Salmond says that when Paul uses it of God, it is "a term of grace, expressing good pleasure as kind intent, gracious will" (p. 252). Here it directs attention to the fact that God's election is an act of His own pure goodness, of His own benevolent sovereignty. What He did, He did solely because it seemed right and good for Him to

do it. "Grace," writes Simpson, "is not measured by desert, but bestowed at the option of the donor. If I give all my goods to feed the poor or ransom a crew of galley-slaves I have an undoubted right to select my beneficiaries as I think best" (p.25).

Fifth, the ultimate ² end of God's choice, of His foreordination of sinners, is "the praise of the glory (splendor) of his grace" (vs. 6). Just as Israel was chosen to live to God's praise (Isa. 43:21), so those who are chosen in Christ must live to the praise of the splendor of His grace. The "glory of his grace" may suggest generally grace in its gloriousness. The context shows that the reference is to the profuse outpouring of God's grace "wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (vs. 6). Weymouth: "with which He has enriched us in the beloved One." The overall teaching, then, is that grace has been gloriously manifested and (because of this) is to be eternally praised. "The design of redemption," wrote Hodge, "is to exhibit the grace of God in such a conspicuous manner as to fill all hearts with wonder and all lips with praise" (p. 38).

Notes:

1 We are here following Salmond's terminology. Calvin's interpretation, though not identical, is not radically different. He understood Paul's statement to mean that Christ is in the primary sense the "Elect" of God and that in electing Him, God chose us "in him."

2 The immediate purpose has been stated in verses 4, 5: that we should be holy and blameless and that we should receive adoption into the family of God.

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Union with Christ



Dr. Greg Gilbert



Dr. Bob Curtis



Dr. Curtis
McClain



Dr. Terry Chrisope

February 25 & 26, 2020

First Baptist Church of Fenton
650 Oakwood Drive
Fenton, MO 63026

You can find more information at: <http://sbfcmw.com>.

**SPURGEON
BAPTIST
ASSOCIATION
OF CHURCHES**

**PO Box 155
Wamego KS 66547**

Phone: (785) 456-8513

Email:
spurgeonassociation@gmail.com

Contact Us:

Administrative Council:

J.W. Glidewell

Moderator & Western Coordinator

Phone: (785) 772-1176

jwglidewell@gmail.com

Terry Coker

Vice Moderator

& Eastern Coordinator

Terry.Coker@fbcfenton.com

Tony Mattia

Corresponding Secretary

Phone: (785) 456-3796

spurgeonassociation@gmail.com

Ken Jorgenson, At Large

kjorg@hotmail.com

Robin Jackson, At Large

jacksonrobin@gmail.com

Bill Ascol, At Large

bascol@sbcglobal.net

Lyn Hansen, At Large

pastorlyn@insidenp.com

Anthony Harwell, At Large

anthonyharwell@gmail.com



WWW.SBAOC.ORG

MEN AVAILABLE FOR PULPIT SUPPLY

Kevin Berens
Colby, Kansas
Email: berens.kevin@gmail.com
Cell Phone: 785-332-7184

Nathaniel Penland
Lawrenceville, Georgia
Email: n8penland@gmail.com
Phone: 678-925-7024

Tim Lambert
Lindsborg, Kansas
Email: tlambert@smokyvalley.org
Phone: 785-614-3651

Bake Ottogy
St. Louis, Missouri
Email: bakeottogy@gmail.com
Phone: 636-467-7446

Brad Richardson
Lawrence, Kansas
Email: richbud@hotmail.com
Phone: 785-766-7268

John Grove
Ocala, FL
Email: trsjwg@gmail.com
Phone: 352-286-5494

PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.



Baptist Association of Churches